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# The Relationship Among Disclosure, Internalized Homophobia, Religiosity, and Psychological Well-Being in a Lesbian Population

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THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG DISCLOSURE, INTERNALIZED  
HOMOPHOBIA, RELIGIOSITY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-  
BEING IN A LESBIAN POPULATION

by

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG DISCLOSURE, INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA, RELIGIOSITY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN A LESBIAN POPULATION

Sharon Lyn Clayman  
Old Dominion University, 2004  
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This study investigated the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity in a lesbian population and how these three variables are related to psychological well-being in order to build upon the scant amount of empirical research on these variables in the lesbian psychological literature. A total of 679 women, 18 to 70 years old, and from all across the country were recruited via the internet to participate in a web-based survey. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale (Szymanski & Chung, 2001), the Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), the Behavioral Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (Carroll & Gilroy, 2000), the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989), the Age-Universal Intrinsic-Extrinsic (I-E) Scale, Amended (Maltby & Lewis, 1996), and the Quest Religious Orientation Scale, Amended (Maltby & Day, 1998). Results indicate that both higher verbal and behavioral disclosure correlate with psychological well-being and less internalized homophobia. Overall, no strong relationship was found between religiosity and disclosure or between religiosity and psychological well-being. Higher religiosity (intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest religious orientation) was, however, correlated with greater internalized homophobia. This study

also found that psychological well-being is related to less internalized homophobia. Low internalized homophobia, high intrinsic religiosity, and low extrinsic religiosity are associated with higher levels of psychological well-being. Future research should continue to investigate the use of the Behavioral Self-Disclosure Questionnaire, should further investigate the relationship between "religious" and "spiritual" identity, and should take a more specified approach to studying religion and its relationship with psychological well-being in a lesbian population so that specific religions and religious subgroups are examined.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The decision regarding disclosure of one's sexual orientation to others is one with which all lesbians contend. The conscious and deliberate process of letting others know one's sexual orientation is one with which heterosexuals are not involved. The vast majority of people learn to assume that everyone's sexual orientation is heterosexual, unless they find out otherwise. Lesbians have the task of deciding whom they are going to notify about their sexual orientation and how to do this. There are benefits and risks involved in disclosing one's sexual orientation. Whereas lesbians deliberately choose to disclose to some people they may also deliberately choose to remain closeted with others. There are many factors that are considered in the decision to disclose or remain closeted. How the decision is made is highly individualized and depends upon a complex interaction of multiple variables (Kahn, 1991, Schope, 2002). Ultimately, the process of disclosure is ongoing for lesbians because life is such that we are always meeting new people socially and finding new jobs in which we interact with new people. Furthermore, one may grow closer to friends and family over time and therefore decide to come out of the closet to them.

In addition to disclosure, internalized homophobia is another variable that merits consideration. Internalized homophobia is a construct that describes how homosexuals may internalize the negative attitudes and assumptions about homosexuality that are presented in the larger heterosexual culture. This construct, also sometimes referred to as

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internalized homonegativity, is detrimental to an individual's sense of self (Downey & Friedman, 1995; Margolies, Becker, & Jackson-Brewer, 1987) and to her or his relationships with others (Sophie, 1987). Negative attitudes and assumptions about homosexuality that are internalized are linked with feelings of guilt, shame, and self-hatred. Women who live in a society that devalues homosexuality and regard it as deviant receive subtle messages from a very young age that homosexuality is wrong and something of which to be ashamed. Internalized homophobia is especially important to study because all lesbians experience it to some degree, it is an important cause of psychological distress for lesbians, it organizes developmental factors that are unique to homosexuals, and reducing internalized homophobia is understood to be an important process in therapy with homosexuals (Shidlo, 1994).

Unlike disclosure and internalized homophobia, religiosity is not a variable that affects all lesbians. Similar to heterosexuals, some lesbians are raised in families that do not subscribe to any religion and some are raised in families that do. Since many religions are openly unaccepting and intolerant towards homosexuals, religious lesbians face a struggle that religious heterosexuals do not. These lesbians are faced with the task of reconciling their desire to sustain and deepen their religious devotion with a religion that shows conditional love for them. Although different religious denominations vary in their levels of tolerance, many denominations convey a direct message that homosexuality is immoral and sinful to the religious constituents (Davidson, 2000). In fact, there are only a few of the more than 2,500 religious denominations in the United States that are affirming of homosexuality (Sherkat, 2002). This presents an enormously difficult struggle for homosexuals who find solace, peace, love and understanding within

a religious institution. Lesbians who grow up in a religious environment and who come to terms with their homosexuality in adolescence or later face a process of determining how two oftentimes opposing forces can fit into their lives. A long struggle may ensue between the desire to receive validation for one's sexual orientation, the desire to integrate one's sexual orientation into one's identity, and the desire to remain a part of the religious faith in which one was raised (Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien, & Williams, 1994).

This study investigated the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity and/or spirituality. Disclosure and internalized homophobia have both been correlated with psychological well-being. Religiosity has been correlated with psychological well-being with a heterosexual population, but it has not yet been studied in terms of psychological well-being with a homosexual population. This study will attempt to provide a better understanding of the relationship between disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity and/or spirituality in a lesbian population and will build upon the scant amount of empirical research on these variables in the lesbian psychological literature. Additionally, this study will elucidate how these three variables are related to psychological well-being in a lesbian population.

#### Disclosure

Disclosure is an important variable to look at within the context of lesbian identity. In fact, sexual orientation disclosure is considered an essential part of lesbian and gay male identity development (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Although disclosure is regarded as an important part of homosexual identity development, the decision to disclose is often one that involves quite a bit of forethought. Many lesbians face



uncertainty when pondering whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation to others. The decision-making process of whether to disclose one's sexual identity involves a variety of factors. Some factors may support the decision to come out whereas others may support the decision to stay in the closet. The weighing of these factors against each other is extremely individualized, occurs over the course of a lifetime, and decisions about disclosure may change from moment to moment as circumstances and contexts change (Omarzu, 2000). Since disclosure is related to many variables in one's life, understanding the factors and the process involved in the complex decision to disclose eliminates many of the internal and external contextual variables in one's life.

#### *Benefits and Risks of Disclosure*

The decision to disclose is a weighty one because of the potential negative responses from others. These negative responses may involve grave consequences such as the loss of friendships, loss of family members, loss of children, loss of access to health care, loss of a job, loss of certain legal rights, and the loss of the security that one's physical and emotional health will not be unexpectedly compromised by verbal and/or physical harassment. Lesbians in different places across the lifespan are vulnerable to different risks. Knowledge and awareness of these risks give pause and reason for reflection before one chooses to disclose one's sexual orientation to others. On the other hand, taking the risk to disclose can be quite beneficial and improve one's quality of life and psychological well-being.

*Current state of affairs and risk.* The hesitation to disclose one's sexual orientation should be viewed as a mature, safe, and legitimate response within the current conservative political climate and with the status quo in regards to equal rights

legislation. Although this is the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and progress has been made over the years in terms of gay rights, there continues to be an astonishing amount of legitimized discrimination that perpetuates inequality between heterosexuals and those of other sexual orientations. Many states do not have anti-discrimination policies that protect homosexuals from getting fired from their jobs based on their sexual orientation. Closeted lesbians who know where lesbians congregate socially may choose not to go to those places for fear of being seen and subsequently losing their jobs (Lewis, 1984). The United States military has maintained the right to discharge an individual solely based on his or her sexual orientation (Fassinger, 1991). Many states have laws that bar gay parents from adoption simply because they are gay. Gay parents are frequently denied custody of their children because views that gay parenting is unhealthy persist (Fassinger, 1991).

The reality is that many gay men and lesbians are verbally and physically threatened and attacked in public and private spheres. Some studies report that as many as 92% of gay men and lesbians have experienced verbal threats and over 33% have experienced violence directly related to their homosexuality (Fassinger, 1991). In the 1997 National Lesbian Health Care Survey, 52% of the participants had been verbally attacked for being lesbian, 6% had been physically attacked for being lesbian, and 8% had lost jobs because of their sexual orientation (Bradford, Ryan & Rothblum, 1997). Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (1999) also found evidence of hate crime victimization in their study of 2259 lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. During the previous year, 56% of the participants were verbally harassed, 19% were threatened with violence, 17% were chased or followed by someone, 12% had something thrown at them, and 5% were spat

on by people who were intolerant of their sexual orientation. D'Augelli and Grossman (2001) stated that the results of their study on victimization of older lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults are consistent with other studies in that gay or bisexual men experience more victimization than do lesbian or bisexual women. Even though physical attacks might seem to be the most violent and feared response to disclosure, homosexuals consider psychological damage from rejection far worse. Scorn, ridicule, and alienation are considered the worst potential responses to disclosure that someone could experience (Wells & Kline, 1987). Herek et al. (1999) found that homosexuals who have been the targets of hate crime victimization are more psychologically distressed than those who have suffered from nonbiased victimization.

In addition to being psychologically or physically harmed out in public, there is also an unfortunate reality that many young homosexuals are psychologically and physically harmed at home. D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth between 14 and 21 years, who disclosed their sexual orientation to their family members, were more likely to be verbally and physically abused by them than those who did not disclose. Family relations may be strained or cut off after a member of the family discloses her or his sexual orientation. This loss of emotional and financial support can be disastrous to a teenager who has not yet finished high school. Whether at home or in public, being out places homosexuals at a much higher risk of being verbally or physically harassed by homophobic people in society (Herek et al., 1999).

*Risk assessment.* The process of disclosure involves ongoing risk assessment. Lesbians and gay men engage in a constant risk assessment that helps paint a clear

picture of just how much they would gain and how much they would lose by disclosing their sexual orientation. Whether or not an individual chooses to disclose or not disclose one's sexual orientation is the result of the weighing of the risks and the benefits involved (Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Carroll & Gilroy, 2000; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Harry, 1993; Morris, 1997; Wells & Kline, 1987). The higher the risk involved in disclosure the higher the levels of emotional and physiological arousal. This includes factors such as distress and anxiety. Individuals weigh the subjective utility of the disclosure, the perceived value, and the subjective risk. If disclosure is of high utility and high risk then an approach-avoidance conflict is created in which there is a strong desire to disclose but there is also a strong possibility of rejection (Omarzu, 2000). The weighing of subjective utility versus subjective risk is generally used to determine how much breadth, duration, and depth the disclosure will involve. A higher subjective risk is equated with more breadth, less duration, and less depth. In addition to amount of disclosure, Omarzu has proposed that people generally engage in a decision-making process that determines content and intimacy level. The risks involved include rejection by the listener, loss of autonomy and integrity, loss of control, betrayal, and causing the listener discomfort. All of these risks seem to make people feel extremely vulnerable and when there is potential that these risks might be combined the likelihood of disclosure becomes significantly reduced.

There is a constant cost benefit analysis when it comes to disclosing to others, especially considering family members. The closer an individual is to their family and the more satisfaction that they receive from their relationships with their family members, the greater the risk involved in disclosing to them (Kahn, 1991). The potential

consequences of losing loved ones are incredibly harmful and devastating to face. Intimidation by parents is shown to have an impact on stage development, sex-role attitude, homophobia, and openness. Intolerant parents can have a very strong impact on the development of children who are coming to terms with their sexual orientation. In fact, Kahn (1991) wrote that intolerance, and the fear of having that intolerance directed at oneself, is perhaps more influential than the impact of a healthy environment on openness.

*Benefits of disclosure.* Disclosure of sexual orientation also has many potential benefits. Although there are risks of many losses involved in disclosing one's sexual orientation to others, some lesbians feel that the losses that come about as a result of disclosure are short term and that the benefits are more long-term (Kahn, 1991). The long-term benefits include a significant reduction in fears of exposure and internal conflicts (Schope, 2002). Despite the potential negative consequences that lesbians face, disclosure has been found to strongly relate to the development of a positive lesbian identity (Miranda & Storms, 1989). The many benefits that come about as a result of disclosure include social approval, relationship development, reduced distress, social control, and identity development (Omarzu, 2000). In addition to improved close relationships, disclosure is also correlated with physical health and psychological adjustment (Omarzu, 2000). For instance, disclosure helps homosexuals maintain a positive self-image (Wells & Kline, 1987). By opening up to others, one also opens oneself up to validation from others. Furthermore, being open with others helps one to maintain one's integrity by continuing a previous pattern of self-disclosure and not responding to external pressures to change (Harry, 1993). In addition to internal benefits

from disclosure, there are also external benefits from disclosure. For instance, disclosure may be beneficial for homosexuals who are involved in searching for a potential romantic partner (Harry, 1993). Also, greater disclosure has also been correlated with receiving mental health services and overall having more service options (Bradford et al., 1997).

Disclosure may have an extremely beneficial impact on relationships. Omarzu (2000) found that the benefits of disclosure are generally social in nature. For one thing, disclosure allows many people to be more honest in their relationships (Gartrell, 1981; Wells & Kline, 1987). Some may have a strong desire to be true to themselves and to engage in more authentic interpersonal relationships (Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Radonsky & Borders, 1995; Wells & Kline, 1987). Disclosure to important people in one's life, such as parents, may result in increased self-esteem and a more integrated identity (Murphy, 1989). Lesbians who are closeted often spend a lot of time analyzing every social interaction for clues that she may have given away her sexual orientation. Life may seem lonely and isolating and it may be difficult to maintain a positive self-image for lesbians who keep social relationships at arms length and constantly alter personal information to provide a different image to the public. Another motivation to disclose is that once one is comfortable disclosing then the opportunity to join a community that shares similar struggles and pleasures arises (Gartrell, 1981).

Although disclosure may at times seem like an extremely threatening and high-risk event, the option of staying closeted is wrought with its own displeasures and discomforts. A lack of disclosure is correlated with fear of exposure (Bradford et al., 1997). A lessened fear of exposure is an extraordinary benefit to lesbians who expend a great deal of mental and physical energy hiding their sexual orientation from others.

Hiding one's sexual orientation from others requires a good amount of energy and a consistent heightened vigilance of one's own emotional responses, actions, and the perceptions of others (Gartrell, 1981). Morris (1997) believes that concealing one's sexual orientation is actually more difficult than the challenging process of disclosure. There are many positive and joyful aspects of life for homosexuals that are somehow related to their homosexuality and those who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to others are not able to share these aspects with others. Coming out allows homosexuals to freely share these joyous aspects of their lives with others.

### *Disclosure as a Process*

Although disclosure may be thought of by many as an act that takes place at one particular time to one particular person, disclosure is more accurately conceptualized as a process that takes place over time. As this section will point out, disclosure is a process that is composed of many different dimensions. It is also a process that takes place across an individual's entire lifespan. Even though disclosure takes place over the lifespan, the majority of homosexuals are not "out" to everyone in their lives. The process of disclosure generally involves coming out to groups of people in one's life in a particular order, and though many homosexuals engage in this process of disclosure, many engage in multiple avoidance strategies in order to remain distanced from the process.

*Multidimensionality.* The process of "coming out" may be broken down into different components. Although disclosure is sometimes taken to be synonymous with coming out, coming out may also be understood as a complex multidimensional process with disclosure representing one of the dimensions (Morris, 1997). The other dimensions

of coming out for women include sexual identity formation, sexual expression and behavior, and lesbian consciousness. Coming out to oneself is understood to be a part of the process that is just as important as coming out to others. de Monteflores and Schultz (1978) understand "coming out" to be a process that involves the recognition of sexual preferences and the integration of this knowledge into one's personal and social life. They conceptualize the disclosure process as moving from an inner experience to a more public experience. Thus, awareness of same-sex attractions tends to occur first, then disclosure to friends, then family members, then co-workers, and then other people in the public.

There are many different sub-processes that make up the overall process of disclosure. Identity formation, cognitive transformation, recasting the past, self-labeling, self-disclosure and validation, and socialization are all aspects of the coming out process (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Identity formation involves integrating one's sexuality into the rest of one's identity. Cognitive transformation refers to changing the connotation of the term 'homosexual' from negative to positive. Recasting the past involves recognizing and placing meaning on parts of one's past that one may not have attributed any meaning to previously. Self-labeling refers to choosing a label which in turn helps one integrate different experiences and seek specific ones out. Self-disclosure and validation are acts that support the congruence between one's public and one's real self. Socialization is an ongoing part of the disclosure process that refers to learning about gay culture and the role that one plays in society as a homosexual.

*Across the lifespan.* A comprehensive understanding of disclosure involves a sense of disclosure being multidimensional process as well as one that takes place across



the lifespan. Although initially people may believe that coming out to others is a one-time event, eventually people come to understand that coming out is a process that occurs over time. Fluctuations are an inherent part of the lengthy process. Homosexuals face the decision of whether or not to come out in every new environment and with every new person they encounter (Fassinger, 1991). Individuals may vary in terms of their comfort disclosing their sexual orientation. Homosexuals may be comfortable disclosing only to certain people and only in certain environments. Therefore, lesbians and gay men may vacillate between homosexual and heterosexual identities depending on their own internal comfort levels and the assumptions others make about their sexual orientation (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Fluctuations in openness may change over time as well (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Individuals may resort to using stigma-evasion strategies during situations in which they are less comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation. These stigma-evasion strategies may include acting in ways that are aligned with their gender so as not to attract attention to their homosexuality (Troiden, 1989). High risk and poor circumstances often characterize the situations in which homosexuals disclose their sexual orientation. The process of disclosure often takes place with no or few role models, poor support systems, inadequate legal protection, and the potential loss of a primary racial/ethnic community (Fassinger, 1991).

Certainly part of the process of disclosure and coming to terms with a homosexual identity involves grieving losses (Lewis, 1984). Feelings of anger and sadness may arise throughout the process. The decision to honor one's same-sex attraction, to integrate one's same-sex attractions into one's identity, to learn to value a new sexual identity, and to disclose this identity to others also means giving up privileges that are awarded to

heterosexuals such as social acceptance. It also means reevaluating and possibly giving up dreams that one has for oneself that may fit a heterosexual lifestyle such as marriage and children. Losses may also refer to the loss of a sense of acceptance in one's family or feelings of security that one would not ever face losing their job, housing, or children based on their sexual orientation.

*Stage theory.* Some researchers have proposed over the years that the coming out process takes place in a stage-like fashion. This idea implies that coming out happens in a linear and progressive fashion during which individuals grow progressively more comfortable with their sexual orientation, become more comfortable self-labeling, and gradually disclose their sexual orientation to more and more people. These stage models were mainly a product of the research that was done in the 1970's and 1980's (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). While some researchers continue to find these models helpful, more and more researchers are commenting on how inapplicable these theories are to the actual experiences of those individuals whose sexual identity develops over the years. Some individuals may indeed progress through several of the stages that are theorized in the stage models, however the sexual identity development of many individuals often times happens in a nonlinear fashion. Individuals frequently regress through the stages, remain at one stage for a long period of time, or skip stages. Kahn (1991) found that people do not progress through sexual identity development stages in a linear fashion. Her study found that women progress through stages at different speeds, some may skip stages, and some may never achieve the final stage. As an alternative to the stage model theory, Harry (1993) found that the sexual identity development for homosexuals may be understood in relation to a variety of structural and individual conditions.

The stage of homosexual identity development that an individual is in is directly related to their comfort level disclosing her or his sexual orientation. Although stage models have been proposed and referred to for years throughout the literature, they are much more helpful theoretically than they apply to reality. During the beginning stages of homosexual identity development an individual is less likely to disclose (Kahn, 1991; Schope, 2002). Women who are at the beginning stages of identity development generally experience confusion and discomfort with their emerging identity. These women are also not likely to label themselves as lesbians. Consistent with Cass' model of identity development, women who are further along in their identity development as lesbians are more likely to disclose their lesbian identity to others and more likely to feel increased value in the process of disclosure (Kahn, 1991). Troiden's model of homosexual identity development describes a series of four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment, during which individuals move from experiencing discomfort and confusion about their sexual identity towards feelings of greater comfort and self-acceptance (Troiden, 1989). As individuals move through these stages disclosure becomes easier and more desirable.

The speed through which people move through the sexual identity development stages offers more information about an individual's self-acceptance. The speed with which one moves through the stages may be related to readiness and comfort disclosing one's sexual orientation. Kahn (1991) found that women who move rapidly through the stages of lesbian identity development are less comfortable being open and disclosing their sexual orientation when compared with women who progress through the stages more slowly. Kahn theorized that women who take more time to process their identity,

process their identity at deeper levels, and integrate their changes more fully are more prepared to share their identity with others.

*Partial disclosure.* Taking into consideration that disclosure is an ongoing lifelong process, it makes sense that most lesbians are partially out of the closet. It is difficult to be completely out of the closet because social circles, place of residence, and workplaces are constantly shifting. Eventually it can be both confusing and demoralizing to have a life in which one is "out" to only certain people and in only certain environments. Also, as a result of selective disclosure over the years it is more common than not that homosexuals are "out" to some and not to others. In the National Lesbian Health Care Survey (Bradford et al., 1997) almost 90% of the lesbian participants were "out" to all gay and lesbian people they know, however very few of the participants were "out" to all family members and coworkers. Partial disclosure to others, the reality for most lesbians, is a stressful reality to maintain. Having to remind oneself constantly of who one is "out" to and who one is not "out" to in particular settings can be tiring as well as confusing. In order to avoid these inconsistencies one may choose to disclose. Having consistency of disclosure across people and settings helps one to maintain a consistent and stable identity. Additionally, there is greater congruence between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others across settings (Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Murphy, 1989). Disclosure of one's homosexual identity contributes to a more integrated identity. In a study by Murphy (1989), women who had disclosed their homosexual identity to others experienced less of a need to compartmentalize their identities. They experienced greater freedom to maintain their lesbian identity from one setting to another.

*Order of disclosure.* Lesbians who disclose their sexual orientation to others tend to do so in a specific order. They tend first to tell their gay friends, then their straight friends, then their family members, and lastly their co-workers (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). Beals and Peplau (2001) also found a trend of lesbians first disclosing their sexual orientation to friends and then to family. Similarly, Schope (2002) found that gay men first disclose to friends. The 1997 National Lesbian Health Care Survey (Bradford et al., 1997) found that lesbians tend to be the most comfortable disclosing to their gay and lesbian friends and the least comfortable disclosing to their co-workers. This order of disclosure most likely results from an evaluation of the type of response and level of support that they are predicting from the different groups. In fact, Wells and Kline (1987) conducted a qualitative study and found that most lesbians and gay men sense that disclosure to family members and co-workers involves the greatest risk of rejection and discrimination.

The order of people to whom homosexuals tend to disclose their identity is parallel to the order of people from whom they receive the most social support. Gay men and lesbians generally receive support first from their friends, then partner, then family, and then co-workers (Kurdek, 1988). While gay men and lesbians tend to disclose to the same order of people, the disclosure of lesbians to each group happens on average one to five years after the disclosure of gay men (Troiden, 1989). Clearly, it seems that those people to whom gay men and lesbians are most comfortable disclosing are the people who provide the most social support. Certainly, opening up to people is a prerequisite for gaining support. Perhaps gay men and lesbians are able to sense who in their lives will most readily offer support and therefore they disclose to them first.

In spite of the general consensus in the literature about order of disclosure, Radonsky and Borders (1995) did not find a particular order of people to whom homosexuals disclosed their sexual orientation. Nor do their results support Cass's (1979) stage model that specifies a particular coming out process. Radonsky and Borders found that only half of the lesbians in their study had first disclosed to other lesbians. The other half of the lesbian sample first disclosed to many other groups. Also, in opposition to Cass's model, there was not a clear link between stage of identity and number of people to whom lesbians disclosed.

*Avoidance of disclosure.* Although there are many differences in the ways that homosexuals approach disclosure, some choose to avoid, consciously or unconsciously, the process of disclosure all together. For the most part, desires to avoid disclosure to oneself and others operate on an unconscious level. Since disclosure does indeed present an enormous risk to homosexuals, many will engage in behaviors that counteract any tendencies they may have to get in touch with same-sex attraction. Homosexuals who are struggling with their same-sex attractions will often engage in behaviors that take them in the opposite direction of acceptance of feelings and disclosure to others. Troiden (1989) describes these avoidant behaviors as part of an individual's identity confusion stage. This stage is often associated with a changing sense of self, homosexual arousal and behavior, awareness of the stigma of homosexuality, and inaccurate information about what kind of people homosexuals really are. Individuals will avoid dealing with identity confusion through several techniques. Many will stay away from behaviors and interests that they believe are associated with homosexuality. Some will begin to only socialize with people of the opposite sex so that peers and family do not suspect anything. Many

will avoid exposure to information about homosexuality. Some will become hostile towards homosexuals, some will force themselves to date and have sex with those of the opposite sex, and some will escape their feelings through substance abuse (Troiden, 1989).

### *Disclosure and Demographic Variables*

The multiple demographic variables in one's life can have an immense impact on whether, how, when, and to what extent an individual discloses her or his sexual orientation to others. Harry (1993) referred to these variables as "structural and individual conditions" and he found that they impact decisions of self-disclosure for everyone. This paper will touch upon level of income, occupation, nature of friends, age, location of residence, and religiosity and will briefly discuss how they each relate to disclosure.

*Income.* Harry's (1993) research, conducted on an all male population, and perhaps not generalizable to a female population, found that individuals with higher incomes were less likely to self-disclose in the workplace. Similar results were found by Schope (2002) and Wells and Kline (1987), also with all male populations. Those with higher incomes may be less likely to self-disclose because they may not want to consider losing their jobs, adjusting to another lifestyle, and being unable to secure another job for which they have received years of training (Harry, 1993). In contrast, the National Lesbian Health Care Survey of 1997, with a sample of 1,925 lesbians, found that women in the lowest and the highest income groups had the highest levels of disclosure (Bradford et al., 1997).

*Occupation.* Disclosure also appears related to occupation. Harry (1993) found in his study of gay men that teachers are the most closeted. He postulated that perhaps teachers are the most closeted of all professionals because disclosing their sexual orientation would lead to a high risk of job loss. Harry (1993) also found that gay men in traditional professions (e.g., lawyer, doctor, engineer, business-related) are unlikely to self-disclose and that artists, entertainers, those in helping professions, and those in service positions are more likely to disclose. In contrast, Schope (2002) found that about 80% of gay men are “out” in the workplace, regardless of the level of tolerance in the workplace.

*Friends.* The kind of friends one has may also impact how and when one chooses to disclose. Those with more homosexual friends are more likely to be “out” (Harry, 1993). Friends may also come as the result of being “out”, being part of a homosexual social network, and making decisions to spend more time in areas that are populated with and frequented by homosexuals.

*Age.* Age is a significant factor in the disclosure process that is important to take into consideration. Younger individuals are more likely to disclose to more categories of people (e.g., friends, family, co-workers, employers; Voisard, 1995). Voisard (1995) hypothesized that the differences in disclosure patterns across the ages may be related to the changing perceptions by lesbians that disclosure is an increasingly important step to take. In Schope’s (2002) study on the various variables impacting the disclosure process, he stated that his most important finding in the study was that disclosure is significantly related to age. Schope (2002) did not find much difference in levels of disclosure between younger (age 16-30) and middle aged men (31-49), however he did find that



older men (50 and older) were significantly less open about their sexual orientation. He found that older men have higher levels of internalized homophobia, that they continue to compartmentalize their lives in terms of whom they are “out” to, and they maintain a high level of fear of exposure. He hypothesized that the reason why older men differ from younger men in terms of these variables is because of the different social climate towards homosexuals in which they grew up.

*Area of residence.* Area of residence is another demographic variable that has an impact on the process of disclosure. In terms of location of residence, those living in predominantly heterosexual neighborhoods are less likely to disclose than those living in neighborhoods with a sizable gay population (Harry, 1993). Many gay men and lesbians move to urban areas because these areas are generally more open and accepting of different lifestyles. The larger population in urban areas promises more anonymity and offers more control over personal information dispersion. More gay men who live in urban areas tend to be open about their sexual orientation than those who live in suburban or rural areas (Schope, 2002). The experience of having grown up in a suburban or rural area seems to negatively affect the disclosure process. Schope (2002) found that homosexuals who grow up and remain in a suburban or rural setting are more likely to remain closeted to parents than those who eventually move to a more urban area.

*Religiosity.* Religiosity is yet another variable that can significantly impact one's disclosure process. Surprisingly, not much research has investigated the relationship between disclosure and religiosity. Schope (2002) looked at a whole host of variables and their relationship with disclosure and one of these variables was religiosity. He did not find a strong relationship between religiosity and disclosure. He did find that the men

in his study who were not religious had much higher levels of disclosure to their parents than those who were somewhat or very religious. The study also found that the level of parental religiosity affects disclosure for some gay men. Younger gay men with very religious parents were the most likely to remain closeted. Perhaps this is because the amount and severity of the risks involved in disclosure do not outweigh the benefits for them.

#### *Disclosure and Impact on Intimate Relationships*

The literature on lesbians in same-sex relationships has examined the impact that disclosing one's sexual orientation to family, friends, and co-workers has on the relationships. Family, friends, and co-workers may have a variety of different responses when they learn about a same-sex relationship. Opening up to others about one's sexual orientation can have a strengthening or weakening effect on significant relationships. The support that lesbians receive after having disclosed about an intimate relationship is an essential emotional resource.

*Disclosure and social support.* Disclosure of lesbian identity has been shown to correlate strongly with levels of social support. Higher levels of disclosure are strongly correlated with higher levels of social support. Furthermore, social support contributes strongly to the well-being and strength of relationships (Jordan & Deluty, 2000). In fact, the best predictor for receiving social support from friends and family members is being "out" to them (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). This is because the more open that a lesbian is about her sexual orientation the more likely she is to come into contact with other lesbians. Jordan and Deluty (1998) found that lesbians who have highly disclosed their sexual orientation are more satisfied with their social support system and have been "out"

for longer periods of time. Being "out" is a precursor to finding social support (Bradford & Ryan, 1988). After all, if a lesbian is not "out" as an individual or as part of a couple, then those in her support network will not be apt to provide support since one can not knowingly offer support for something of which one is not aware. Lesbians who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to others have not opened themselves up to receiving support and validation from others. The process of gaining social support from others leads to a number of positive consequences.

Lesbians who disclose their sexual orientation to others are also more likely to have more lesbian friends and be more involved in the gay community (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). Belonging in the gay community provides interactions with people who have experienced what it is like to come out and live in the world as a homosexual. Without a sense of community one commonly experiences a sense of isolation and low self-esteem that frequently results from not knowing anyone who experiences life as s/he does (Lewis, 1984). Lesbians who are able to interact with other homosexuals receive ongoing support from individuals who fully understand the process that they are going through, the challenges that are involved in coming out, and the importance of offering solid stable bonds of friendship. Social support from others in general is crucial, however social support from other homosexuals is an especially valuable source. Homosexual friends are likely to pass along and encourage the development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that help build and support the emergence and formation of a new homosexual identity (Kahn, 1991). Ultimately social support is extremely beneficial to lesbians at all stages of the coming out process.

Disclosure can result in many different types of social support. Derlega et al. (1993) discuss four different kinds of social support: “esteem support”, “informational support”, “instrumental support”, and “motivational support”. Disclosing personal experiences that are difficult to share can challenge an individual’s sense of self-esteem and worth. Those who listen attentively, share similar personal experiences, avoid criticism, and offer sympathy offer “esteem support” by helping individuals to feel accepted, loved, and valued. “Informational support” is another valuable form of support. Disclosure is one way to communicate one’s needs and allow people to share information, advice, and guidance as to how to approach and cope with a particular situation. “Instrumental support” is the most tangible form of support. Individuals who disclose stressful or difficult experiences notify others that they may need help with things such as running errands. Without disclosing, individuals in one’s life may not be alerted that such help is needed. “Motivational support” refers to verbal encouragement and motivation that people may offer to help someone get through a difficult time. This type of support can strengthen coping mechanisms and the belief that difficult times are only temporary.

*Disclosure and relationship quality.* A positive correlation has been established between disclosure and relationship quality. Greater disclosure of one’s sexual orientation has been directly linked to greater relationship satisfaction (Jordan & Deluty, 2000). Additionally, lesbians who strongly believe disclosure is important, and who are thus more likely to disclose, report high levels of support and authenticity in relationships (Kahn, 1991). Understandably, individuals who keep important features of their lives from people in their lives may have a very difficult time feeling close to others (Cain,

1991). Kurdek (1988) found a clear relationship between social support, relationship quality, and psychological adjustment. It is interesting to consider that disclosure is related to relationship quality and that social support is also related to relationship quality. Perhaps social support is the mediating factor between disclosure and relationship quality. Berger (1990) and Caron and Ulin (1997) found that the more comfortable lesbians are in disclosing their sexual orientation, the higher the quality of their primary relationship. The authors of these studies postulate that disclosure leads to higher relationship quality because disclosure opens up avenues of support with significant family members and friends.

Several researchers have argued that disclosure is not consistently indicative of relationship quality or psychological well-being. Beals and Peplau (2001) did not find a relationship between disclosure of sexual orientation and relationship quality. Similarly, Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) did not find a relationship between disclosure and relationship satisfaction in their study on satisfaction in 275 lesbian couples. They suggested that perhaps the decision to not disclose is adaptive and beneficial for some individuals. Cain (1991) asserted that many homosexuals who are self-accepting may choose to conceal their sexual orientation. He emphasized that self-acceptance is not necessarily positively correlated with "outness" and that the decision to conceal one's sexual orientation should not automatically be pathologized. He found that generally homosexuals choose to conceal their sexual orientation to avoid stigmatization. Consistent with Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) and Cain (1991), Healy (1993) posited that concealment of one's sexual orientation is an adaptive response for many lesbians who live and work in environments where there would be negative consequences as a result of

their disclosure. Healy (1993) clearly states that while disclosure may be quite adaptive for some lesbians, it may be maladaptive for others.

*Discrepant levels of disclosure between partners.* The process of disclosure has different ramifications for one lesbian than it does for two lesbians in a relationship with each other. In a lesbian relationship, the impact of disclosure on the relationship depends on where both women are in terms of disclosure. Each woman comes from a different social context and this context has most likely had a significant impact on her disclosure process. The amount of difference between the women's disclosure processes may significantly impact the relationship. Jordan and Deluty (2000) found that couples with large differences in the amount of disclosure between the partners experienced low levels of satisfaction in their relationships. They hypothesized that perhaps resistance to disclosure is interpreted as lack of commitment to the relationship and the idea that one partner may lack commitment may place strain on the relationship. Beals and Peplau (2001) found, with a lesbian sample, that partners who are equally involved with social events in the gay and lesbian community have greater relationship satisfaction. The more discrepant partners were in terms of their social involvement, the more dissatisfied they were with their relationship. Moderate levels of social involvement with the community led to more relationship satisfaction than did high or low levels.

*Different reasons for disclosure.* Cain (1991) conducted a study with gay men and discovered that there are numerous reasons for disclosure, many of which are social in nature. In addition to assessing the risks and benefits that may accompany disclosure, homosexuals may take into account how nervous they are feeling when they are deciding whether or not to disclose, how close they are with the person with whom they are

speaking, the type of social situation they are in, the relevance of disclosing personal information, and how accepting they are of their own sexual orientation (Cain, 1991). One common reason why an individual might choose to disclose is in order to improve her or his relationship with someone. An individual might be motivated to disclose in order to solve interpersonal problems such as a constant barrage of questions about their whereabouts and their lack of involvement in heterosexual relationships or to prevent potential problems associated with someone accidentally discovering her/his homosexuality. Individuals might use politics as a motive for disclosing their sexual orientation because visibility of homosexuals tends to educate people about homosexuality and reduce homophobia. Although there are many reasons for why an individual might choose to disclose her or his sexual orientation, oftentimes a disclosure happens spontaneously without any planning at all (Cain, 1991).

*Social reactions to disclosure.* There are many factors that play into whether or not a lesbian will disclose her sexual orientation. One of the most important factors is how she perceives the listener will react to the information she is providing about herself (Wells & Kline, 1987). If a lesbian perceives that an individual will react negatively to her "outing", then she will be less likely to disclose her sexual orientation. Conversely, lesbians who expect a positive response to their disclosure will be more likely to disclose (Kahn, 1991). Certainly an evaluation that includes a prediction of how the listener will react, her relationship with that individual, and how important she feels it is that that individual know will ensue. If the cost outweighs the benefit then there will be no disclosure. Anxieties about disclosure run high if the individual plans to disclose intimate material (Derlega et al., 1993; Wells & Kline, 1987). Although many lesbians

receive supportive responses after disclosing their sexual orientation, many lesbians also receive unsupportive responses (Beals & Peplau, 2001). The types of responses that a lesbian receives from others can impact the relationships she has in her life and the way she feels about herself.

Negative reactions to disclosure often lead to lower levels of social support. There is a relationship between the type of social reactions that occur after a lesbian discloses her sexual identity and the quality of social support in her life (Jordan and Deluty, 1998). Many lesbians may foresee that important individuals in their lives will not be accepting and supportive of their sexual orientation so they may choose to withhold that information in order to maintain support that they already have. Often times when lesbians come out to parents, the parents do not respond in a supportive manner (Beals & Peplau, 2001). Lesbians who predict that their parents will not be supportive of their sexual orientation may choose to conceal that information from them in order to maintain the strength of the relationship.

It is uncomfortable, hurtful, and embarrassing when someone reacts negatively to an extremely personal piece of information that is revealed. People seek out confirmation and acceptance of their identities. They yearn to be proud and confident of themselves. They seek to solidify and strengthen their self-esteem. Self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-acceptance are qualities that are sensitive to the reactions of others. Therefore, individuals who are questioning how others will react to sensitive information often decide that is safer to keep the information to themselves. The prospect of disclosing to someone who may not react positively is connected to fears of being negatively evaluated, fears of losing control of the situation, fears of feeling hurt, and fears of



relationship loss (Wells & Kline, 1987). It is clear that one way to preserve and build upon integrity, self-acceptance, self-esteem, pride, and self-confidence is by avoiding subjugation to hostile responses.

In addition to predictions of reactions to disclosure, lesbians evaluate their self-efficacy each time they consider disclosing their sexual orientation (Anderson & Mavis, 1996). Self-efficacy, a concept formulated by Bandura (1986), refers to one's confidence in performing certain behaviors in certain situations. Self-efficacy theory postulates that one's confidence to perform is based on four factors: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Personal performance accomplishments refer to past experiences that one may reflect back upon in which the behavior was performed with a positive or negative outcome. The type of outcome that one received in the past will most likely strongly influence a decision to perform the behavior again. Through vicarious experiences, one's confidence may rise or fall based on what one has learned about other people's experiences performing the behavior. Through verbal persuasion, friends and family may encourage or discourage the behavior. Through emotional arousal, one may experience positive or negative emotions when thinking about performing the behavior. Anderson and Mavis (1996) discovered that when lesbians consider coming out, their appraisal process is influenced by several of these self-efficacy factors. Lesbians' decision to disclose is most significantly affected by emotional arousal, less significantly influenced by verbal persuasion and vicarious experience, and not influenced at all by performance accomplishments. Thus, the types of emotions lesbians experience when considering coming out, the types of messages and amount of encouragement or discouragement

they've received from others about coming out, the types of coming out experiences their peers have experienced, and her expectation of what the response may be are all factored into a lesbians' decision to disclose.

*Closeted single lesbians.* Single lesbians who predict a negative reaction from parents and who withhold information about their sexual orientation are in somewhat of a different position from lesbians who are in relationships. Lesbians who are single may preserve relationships with their parents by not coming out to them, however lesbians in relationships place strain on their relationships by not speaking about their relationship status with their parents (Jordan & Deluty, 2000). Partners of those who do not disclose their relationship status may feel angry and burdened that they are forced to remain silent about their relationship, they may wonder if their partner is ashamed of their relationship, or they may see their partner as submissive and weak.

Single lesbians face frustrations when they are closeted that coupled lesbians do not face. Single closeted lesbians may often feel lonely since they feel isolated from other lesbians and they are often constantly monitoring their environment. They often experience a rising rift between sense of self and the perceptions of others and a declining self-image that results from consistently presenting oneself with an external identity that is not consistent with their internal identity (Gartrell, 1981). In contrast to coupled lesbians, people make constant erroneous assumptions that single lesbians are single heterosexual women. This becomes problematic when single lesbians are asked out by men and they do not feel comfortable giving an honest explanation for the lack of interest. An assumption of heterosexuality also becomes problematic when friends, family, and people in the workplace consistently make efforts to set up dates with men.

Parents become disappointed when their single daughters do not marry and they begin to regard them as socially inadequate. Work-related functions that assume those who attend will bring a date of the opposite sex become uncomfortable for single lesbians, are eventually avoided, and colleagues at work eventually become critical of their antisocial behavior (Gartrell, 1981).

*Impact of disclosure to parents.* Coming out to parents has been shown to have positive consequences that outweigh parental disapproval. A large amount of emotional energy is usually invested in keeping significant others ignorant about one's sexual orientation and one's relationship status (Berger, 1990). This pent up energy can finally be released when one discloses to parents. Before coming out to parents, women involved with other women may become more fearful and anxious over time about the reaction her family would have if they were to find out about her sexual orientation (Lewis, 1984). Thus, disclosing one's sexual orientation to parents is often a large relief since the unknown reactions are now known.

Parental knowledge of a daughter's sexual orientation has an important impact on the relationship in which the daughter is involved. Murphy (1989) found that many lesbians reported that coming out to parents has been important and beneficial for them personally and for their primary relationship. The lesbians in this study felt that being acknowledged for who they really are far outweighed the negative responses that parents had. In addition to being acknowledged for their true selves, they reported that coming out contributed to a decreased sense of isolation and facilitated the process of coming out to other family members and friends (Murphy, 1989). Lesbians are frequently thankful that parents recognize the status of their relationship, something that heterosexuals and

their partners are not prompted to think about or be thankful for. Coming out to parents also serves the purpose of gaining additional acknowledgement of the nature of one's primary relationship that may have previously been viewed as a friendship (Murphy, 1989). This disclosure has an affirming effect on the relationship since the status no longer has to be kept a secret. The recognition of the relationship, the decreased need to keep the relationship a secret, and the ability to move from a compartmentalized self to an integrated self who is able to maintain the same identity across settings and not filter out particular aspects of oneself are all benefits that arise from coming out to parents (Murphy, 1989). These benefits ultimately support and strengthen lesbian couples. Even if parents do not approve of the relationship, the recognition of the relationship seems to be important. As a result of disclosure to parents, lesbian couples are then frequently able to attend family functions and events as a couple (Murphy, 1989). Although parental recognition of a child's lesbian relationship is often a source of joy and thankfulness for the lesbian daughter, parental support is a source of much greater happiness and pleasure. Caron and Ulin (1997) found that the factor that most contributed to relationship quality is support from the family. Upon further analyses they also found that the most specific factor that contributed to relationship quality was when lesbians feel comfortable expressing affection to their partners in front of family members.

*Disclosure and parental intimidation.* There is a form of intimidation that occurs across generations that impacts the level of comfort disclosing one's sexual orientation. Many parents establish a rigid parenting style that places an enormous amount of pressure on their children to conform to their beliefs. If and when children of these kinds

of parents move ahead and attempt to establish an identity that does not correspond to one that is in accordance with their parent's standards and expectations, these parents often react in a way that can make their children feel intimidated. Families with contrasting styles are those that are tolerant, those that respect difference, and those that foster and encourage independence (Kahn, 1991). Children who come from more rigid families are much more likely to experience a form of intergenerational intimidation that discourages them from forming their own unique identity. Lesbians with feminist attitudes, or liberal ideas in terms of women's roles, are generally more comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation. Intergenerational intimidation has a strong impact on lesbians with feminist attitudes and decreases their comfort disclosing (Kahn, 1991). This is understandable considering the kind of parental response to which they have grown accustomed and the expectation that their differences will not be understood or tolerated. These lesbians may experience an ongoing desire to gain the approval of the parent and they may struggle with shame that their parents have instilled in them. All of these factors contribute to decreased comfort disclosing their sexual orientation to parents, and most likely others as well.

*Response of friends and family over time.* The response of family and friends to individuals who disclose their sexual orientation changes over time. Generally individuals move from being less accepting to more accepting over time. Parents may react negatively to their daughters as they disclose their sexuality because they initially perceive their daughter to be a different person from the one they knew previously. Similarly, parents who learn that a friend of their daughter's is actually her partner change their attitudes towards the partner even though the behavior of the partner has not

changed (Murphy, 1989). Although parents initially struggle with negative stereotypes of lesbianism, over time they generally become more accepting (Murphy, 1989).

*Disclosure and General Physical and Psychological Health*

Generally, more disclosure is related to better physical and psychological well-being. As previously stated in this paper, Omarzu (2000) found that disclosure in general is strongly related to physical and psychological well-being for the population at large, not simply homosexuals. Other studies have found that this holds true for disclosure of sexual orientation. Lesbians who feel that being "out" is important, and are thus more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others, report better physical and mental health than those who place less importance on being "out" (Kahn, 1991). This is in comparison with lesbians who do not believe as strongly in the importance of self-disclosure, and are thus less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others.

*Disclosure and psychological health.* The literature points to a relationship between disclosure and positive psychological adjustment. In this relationship, disclosure can be understood as a coping strategy that is linked with positive lesbian and gay identification. Positive identification with a lesbian or gay identity is in turn linked with the promotion of psychological adjustment (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Miranda & Storms, 1989). For example, lesbians who believe disclosure is important report low levels of guilt (Kahn, 1991). Additionally, lesbians with greater disclosure report less anxiety, greater self-esteem, and higher positive affectivity (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). Jordan and Deluty (1998) hypothesized that these positive psychological factors resulted from being able to be open and communicative about a part of their lives that is important to them. They also state that while disclosure may indeed result in higher self-esteem,

greater positive affectivity, and lower anxiety, it is also possible that all of these variables are preexisting and contribute to one's ability to disclose. Overall, the lesbian identity development process is a healthier one for lesbians who have higher levels of self-disclosure (Radonsky & Borders, 1995).

The beneficial effect of disclosure begins to occur when the disparity between how one perceives oneself and others' perceptions of oneself grows smaller. When an individual has an understanding of her/himself that differs significantly from how others understand her/himself, it is likely that this individual will feel misunderstood, separate from others, lonely, anxious, and caught in a cycle of projecting a false or incomplete image to others. Disclosure is a powerful tool that allows greater congruence between self-perception and the perception of oneself by others (Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Fassinger, 1991; Kahn, 1991). Thus, it seems that disclosure of one's sexual orientation is crucial for the construction of a positive homosexual identity and for overall healthy psychological well-being.

Morris, Waldo, and Rothblum (2001) conducted an empirical study that showed that higher levels of disclosure predict lower psychological distress. This study was conducted with 2,401 lesbian and bisexual women who participated in Morris and Rothblum's 1999 Lesbian Wellness Survey. A structural equation model showed that high disclosure is inversely related to psychological distress and that psychological distress is a predictor of increased suicidality. This finding indicates that mental health practitioners need to seriously consider the importance of self-disclosure for lesbian and bisexual women because it could potentially have a direct relationship with levels of suicidality. Factors that were related to greater disclosure were: identification as more

lesbian than bisexual on a continuum, greater participation in the lesbian and gay community, and a significant passage of time since lesbian and bisexual milestones (e.g., coming out) had been reached. Morris et al. (2001) found that indeed demographic factors such as race and religion are important to look at because they are important aspects of identity that influence one's experience. African American women were significantly more psychologically distressed than European American women and less likely to be "out" to others. Jewish women were less psychologically distressed than others (Morris et al., 2001).

*Concealment and health.* Concealment in general has been shown to compromise physical and psychological health. Studies conducted with the population at large show that inhibition, holding back one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, involves physiological work that requires a constant output of energy which puts a great deal of stress on the body (Pennebaker, 1989). There is a conscious restraint that increases skin conductance level in the short term and increases the probability of stress-related physical and psychological illnesses. Individuals who inhibit thoughts and feelings generally do not process certain stressful events fully. The result is that the events are not very well understood or assimilated into the persons experience and this becomes apparent through ruminations, cognitions, and dreams (Pennebaker, 1989).

Concealment of a homosexual identity has potential to compromise the physical health of homosexuals. As far as this writer has noted, all of the research on concealment of homosexual identity and the impact on physical health has been conducted with a male population. Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, and Visschner (1996) found that the degree of concealment of a homosexual identity is in direct proportion to the incidence of cancer



and infectious diseases such as pneumonia, bronchitis, sinusitis, and tuberculosis. This study, which controlled for age, ethnicity, occupational and educational status, health practices, depression, anxiety, negative affectivity, repressive coping, and an inclination to report socially desirable characteristics, showed that those who had only partially disclosed their identity to others were 2.17 times as likely to have one of the diseases in comparison with those who had almost or fully disclosed their identity to people in their lives. Another study found results that similarly connected degree of disclosure to physical health. As opposed to cancer and infectious diseases, this study was on HIV. This study on HIV-seropositive gay men found that HIV infection spread more rapidly in those who had higher levels of identity concealment (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, Visscher, & Fahey, 1996). The direct relationship between concealment of homosexual identity and compromised physical health is striking.

As far as the impact of concealment on psychological health is concerned, the literature has shown that there is a relationship. Similar to a heterosexual population, homosexuals who conceal important information about themselves are more likely to suffer psychologically. Berger (1990) found that men who conceal a homosexual identity are more likely than those who disclose to experience anxiety related to their homosexuality and fears of death. Couples who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to significant people in their lives invest a large amount of emotional energy in maintaining a lie (Berger, 1990). Lesbians who are not well connected with the lesbian community have more somatic complaints than those who are well connected (Szymanski, Chung, & Balsam, 2001). This may be because these lesbians do not have

much of an outlet to disclose and share their thoughts and feelings about their sexual orientation with others.

In contrast to the above-mentioned correlation between concealment and poor psychological health, Cain (1991) asserted that there is no clear correlation. In his qualitative study of gay men he found many practical and advantageous reasons why they decide to conceal their sexual orientation from others. Many of these men in his study chose to conceal their sexual orientation because disclosure seemed inappropriate in more emotionally distant relationships, it involved little perceived benefit, it seemed offensive or disrespectful to the feelings of others, it went against political or ideological beliefs, and it increased their sense of control over the management of personal information in their lives. Cain (1991) wrote that there is "a tendency to view concealment as a symptom of emotional maladjustment, rather than as an attempt on the part of gay individuals to deal with an often hostile and unaccepting social milieu" (p. 72). He advocates depathologizing concealment and seeing it as a strength-based coping mechanism and legitimate protective choice.

#### *Differences Between Gay Men and Lesbians*

Gender is a construct that is powerfully influenced by social forces such that women and men are highly differentiated from each other in many aspects. In fact, Garnets and Kimmel (1993) wrote that "gay men are more similar to heterosexual men, and lesbian women more similar to heterosexual women, than to each other" (p. 25). The process of disclosure is different for gay men than it is for lesbians. Therefore, the process should be studied within the context of one sex in order to attend to the differences. Although there are many differences between gay men and lesbians in terms

of disclosure, gay men and lesbians have similar reasons for why they disclose. Most gay men and lesbians view disclosure as a risk, yet they both tend to view disclosure as something that is self-affirming and something that is necessary for the development of relationships in their lives (Wells & Kline, 1987).

Gay men and lesbians have different patterns of disclosure. For instance, they differ in terms of whom they disclose to and what determines if they disclose. Lesbians consistently choose to disclose to others based on their sense that they will receive a positive response and that they trust the individual to whom they plan to disclose. Gay men are more varied in their reasoning for disclosure. They are also more likely than lesbians to disclose to people who they do not know very well (Wells & Kline, 1987). Lesbians are much more likely to disclose to other lesbians than to heterosexuals whereas gay men are more indiscriminate to whom they disclose (Wells & Kline, 1987).

Gay men and lesbians also differ in terms of how they disclose to others. Generally, lesbians do more preparatory work for disclosures than gay men. Lesbians are more inclined than gay men to consider the person to whom they are going to disclose, to prepare the receiver for the disclosure, and to evaluate the situation in which they are going to disclose (Wells & Kline, 1987). The perception of homophobia in the receiver is a significant factor related to disclosure of sexual orientation. Voisard (1995) found that lesbians monitor the homophobia in people to whom they are considering disclosure. The perception of homophobia in a potential recipient will decrease the likelihood of disclosure.

In addition to differences in how they disclose, gay men and lesbians differ in terms of when they disclose. In general, lesbians take longer to disclose compared to gay

men. Whereas lesbians tend to disclose their sexual orientation to non-gay friends around the age of 28, gay men tend to disclose their sexual orientation to non-gay friends between the ages of 23 to 28. Lesbians tend to disclose to parents around age 30, while gay men tend to do so around age 28. Lesbians who disclose in professional settings do so around age 32, while gay men tend to around age 31 (Troiden, 1989). Perhaps disclosure for gay men occurs earlier because they tend to identify as homosexual about six to eight years earlier than lesbians (Troiden, 1989).

*Involvement in relationships.* The timing of involvement in relationships differs between gay men and lesbians. For instance, lesbians differ from gay men in terms of how and when they become aware of and act on sexual feelings towards people of the same sex (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Gay men tend to become aware of same-gender sexual attraction and act on these feelings when they are in their early to mid adolescent years. Lesbians, on the other hand, tend to become aware of same-gender sexual attraction during their mid to late adolescent years, but they do not tend to act on these feelings until early adulthood (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Gay men tend to act on same-sex sexual feelings about five years earlier than lesbians. They act on sexual feelings only about two years after they become aware of such feelings, while lesbians tend to wait about six years (Troiden, 1989). Lesbians tend to understand what 'homosexual' means and then act on their feelings, whereas gay men tend to act on their feelings before they understand what the term means (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978).

There are other relationship differences between lesbians and gay men besides the timing of involvement in relationships. For instance, Troiden (1989) reported that gay men tend to have several sexual partners before they find someone for a relationship,

whereas lesbians tend to settle down faster into a meaningful relationship. Women tend to explore their sexuality within the context of a relationship as a result of female socialization that teaches women to have and maintain relationships (Lewis, 1984).

Lesbians tend to have more sexual activity with the other sex than gay men. They are also more likely to continue to interact sexually with the other sex after questioning their sexuality. Lesbians are more likely to get married than gay men (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Although there is quite a bit of literature delineating the differences in sexual expression and coming out processes between lesbians and gay men, Barber (2000) contends that there are many methodological issues that make it difficult to measure such constructs and that the similarities between groups are not emphasized sufficiently.

*Use of emotions.* Lesbians openly acknowledge, discuss, and express emotions more than gay men. de Monteflores and Schultz (1978) found that lesbians tend to emphasize their emotions while gay men tend to deny their emotions. They found this behavioral pattern while exploring how lesbians and gay men attempt to avoid sexual orientation labels. They also reported that lesbians tend to romanticize their first same-sex experience and regard it as special while gay men are more likely to avoid discussion of emotion and focus on sexual gratification. These differences are very much aligned with stereotypical gender differences. North American men in general highly value task accomplishment and feel that they need to have emotional control in order to accomplish the tasks. In contrast, North American women place a significant amount of value on social-emotional closeness and they feel that emotional expression is necessary for achieving their goal. Women frequently engage in discussion about sensitive topics with other women and men avoid self-disclosure in interactions with other men (Derlega et al.,

1993). Rather than being specific to homosexuals, the gender differences apparent in how gay men and lesbians negotiate different situations seem to reflect how men and women in general deal differently with situations.

Gay men and lesbians differ in terms of the political and legal issues that are pertinent to them. Child custody issues are generally more important to lesbians than to gay men because women are more likely than men to be awarded custody of children in divorce court (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). Whether or not the court knows that a parent is gay may, or that a parent is leaving a heterosexual relationship for a homosexual relationship, may greatly impact the outcome of the divorce proceedings. Therefore, lesbian women who are involved in a custody battle are perhaps more unlikely than men to disclose any information that may suggest their sexual orientation.

#### *Questions About Measuring Disclosure*

Disclosure of lesbian identity is an important yet difficult variable to measure. One of the reasons why disclosure of lesbian identity is difficult to measure is because disclosure is not an all or nothing phenomenon. Lesbians may have disclosed their identity to some people in their lives and not others. Thus, some lesbians may be out to all of their gay friends, some of their heterosexual friends, none of their family members, and some of their co-workers. A lesbian may report that she has disclosed to a moderate degree when in fact she has very high levels of disclosure in some environments and very low levels in others. One way to measure disclosure is to look at the various people to whom an individual has disclosed (Bradford & Ryan, 1988). Another proposed way to study disclosure is to focus on nonverbal ways in which individuals have disclosed their sexual orientation (Beals & Peplau, 2001).

Beals and Peplau (2001) made the suggestion to study a nonverbal behavioral type of disclosure after they conducted a study involving disclosure and were not satisfied that they had measured the construct adequately. As mentioned previously, Beals and Peplau (2001) did not find a relationship between disclosure of sexual orientation and relationship quality. Since most of the literature suggests that disclosure is beneficial, when they did not find a relationship between disclosure and relationship quality, they began to consider more deeply the way that they measured disclosure. Beals and Peplau (2001) mentioned that, despite their large sample size ( $N=784$ ), their measure did not assess a large enough range of individuals to whom lesbians disclosed. In terms of measuring disclosure adequately, they believe that smaller studies may not reflect the full range of reactionary experiences that lesbians experience after disclosing their sexual orientation.

Carroll and Gilroy (2000) responded to the measure limitation of only looking at verbal disclosure and conducted a study on behavioral disclosure. They recognized that many studies on gay and lesbian disclosure focused solely on verbal disclosure (Beals & Peplau, 2001; Jordan & Deluty, 1998) and thus they set out to examine the effectiveness of looking at behavioral correlates of disclosure. Behavioral self-disclosure consisted of showing one's sexuality rather than discussing it. Examples of behavioral self-disclosure might include such things as wearing gay symbols, walking hand and hand with a partner, or showing up at a family event with a partner. Their study found that behavioral language actually correlates very highly with verbal language that is used as one self-discloses.

Healy (1993) found in a qualitative study with lesbians on self-disclosure that behavioral ways of disclosing is a kind of language that lesbians frequently use for disclosure and is often considered self-affirming. Healy (1993) discovered that many lesbians used behavioral language to communicate about their sexual orientation and partnership status instead of verbal language.

The research on disclosure of sexual orientation points to a clear correlation between sexual orientation disclosure and psychological well-being. Although a few studies have not found correlations between disclosure of sexual orientation and psychological well-being, the majority of the research on disclosure in lesbians has shown that disclosure of one's sexual orientation is directly connected to positive mental health. Many physical and mental health correlates have been studied in relation to disclosure. Researchers who have studied and written about the patterns of disclosure that people exhibit have found a difference between men and women that warrants that each group be studied separately. Multiple aspects of disclosure in lesbians, such as the impetus for disclosing, reasons for remaining closeted, the disclosure decision-making process, and how disclosure impacts relationships have been studied. Although a significant portion of this research is theoretical in nature, the literature on lesbians clearly identifies a relationship between greater disclosure and well-being.

#### Internalized Homophobia

There are many social forces at play in our society that foster a homophobic environment. Homophobia, the irrational fear and intolerance of homosexuals and negative attitudes towards homosexuals, is evident in our culture on a personal, institutional, and systemic level. The strong presence of homophobia in our society presents an obstacle for females to come to terms with feelings of same sex attraction and



to disclose these feelings to others. Through an unconscious and conscious process of learning, people internalize the homophobia present in society and individuals who identify as homosexual or who are forming a homosexual identity come to feel negatively about themselves. This internalization of external homophobia is referred to as internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia is a significant cause of psychological distress for gay men and lesbians (Shidlo, 1994).

### *The Hidden Nature of Internalized Homophobia*

The message that homosexuality is wrong is so ingrained for most people that many do not even consciously realize it is a part of their belief system. As women begin to recognize feelings of attraction to other women they often times become the target of their own hatred (Margolies et al., 1987). Their oppressor resides within themselves. As hatred, anger, and shame are directed inward, these women erect defenses to protect themselves from emotional pain. This defense mechanism that protects women from fully coming into contact with the pain involved in confronting their own homosexuality is internalized homophobia. This defense is a result of the ego getting caught between rules and desires. Fear of being rejected by family members and friends is a significant force that contributes to feelings of self-hatred. The idea of losing friends, feeling isolated and shamed, being disapproved of or even thrown out by family members, and feeling unloved can powerfully influence a decision to withhold information from others and do all that one can to stifle or alter one's sexual orientation. The fear of having to face all of these potential risks and losses may strengthen one's internalized homophobia (Margolies et al., 1987).

Internalized homophobia is understood as existing of conscious and unconscious components (Downey & Friedman, 1995; Malyon, 1982; Margolies et al., 1987). In addition to being something that is active on an interpersonal level between people, internalized homophobia is also a defense mechanism. Internalized homophobia may take many forms. It may take the form of rationalization, denial, projection, and/or identification with the aggressor. These different manifestations of internalized homophobia reflect the multiple layers of the construct and indicate the many different ways that people experience homophobia throughout their lives, the various levels of ego functioning that people maintain, and the multiple ways that people protect themselves through defenses (Margolies et al., 1987).

Frequently individuals do not recognize internalized homophobia in themselves. Since internalized homophobia exists mostly on an underlying and unconscious level it often goes unrecognized. Instead of recognizing the presence of internalized homophobia, individuals become aware of feelings of depression and anxiety that seem to stem from unknown areas (Downey & Friedman, 1995). Often people do not recognize the connection between the depression, anxiety, and internalized homophobia, unless they are involved in therapy. The construct of internalized homophobia has received increasing attention in the psychological literature as researchers have found that internalized homophobia is linked with many variables and that an understanding of these links may help clinicians better understand and treat clients who seek counseling for issues related to their sexual orientation (Downey & Friedman, 1995). In addition to being able to better recognize the existence of internalized homophobia, clinicians and

the process of therapy can assist individuals in learning about the many dimensions of internalized homophobia and how it manifests itself in our daily lives.

### *Multidimensionality of Internalized Homophobia*

The construct of internalized homophobia may be broken down into different dimensions that point to the complexity of a construct that is often thought of as unitary. A five dimensional model proposed and used by Szymanski and Chung (2001) in the development of the Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale (LIHS) details different aspects of internalized homophobia for lesbians. Based on this model, internalized homophobia for lesbians may be understood in terms of connection with the lesbian community, public identification as lesbian, personal feelings about being a lesbian, attitudes towards other lesbians, and moral and religious beliefs about lesbianism. Similarly, Ross and Rosser (1996) conducted a factor analytic study with gay men and found that internalized homophobia can be broken down into four dimensions: concern about publicly identifying as gay, concern about the stigma that may come along with being gay, social comfort with gay men, and the moral and religious acceptability of being gay.

### *Internalized Homophobia Scale for Women*

Much of the research on internalized homophobia to date has largely focused on gay men. Until the LIHS was published in 2001 there was no published scale available to assess specifically internalized homophobia in lesbians. Previously the Nungesser (1983) internalized homophobia scale that used gay men as a sample group was widely used, even by researchers who have studied lesbian populations. The LIHS scale has helped further our understanding of how the construct of internalized homophobia means

something different in relation to lesbians than it does in relation to gay men. Although there is some overlap of experience between men and women, there are many differences, especially in the realm of relationships and sexuality that justify that lesbians should be studied apart from gay men. For example, women generally seek out more emotional intimacy in relationships and place a higher value on romantic love and monogamy than men do (Downey & Friedman, 1995). The impact of gender role socialization is one factor that has an extremely different effect on lesbians than it does on gay men. Other factors that specifically influence lesbian identity formation and differentiate it from gay male identity formation are the impact of feminism, sexism, and the repression of female sexual desire (Roth, 1985; Vargo, 1987).

#### *Correlates of Internalized Homophobia*

Internalized homophobia has been studied in relation to many different variables. Four variables that the literature includes in a discussion of internalized homophobia are self-esteem, social support, psychological distress, and body image.

*Self-esteem.* The internalized homophobia literature shows a connection between internalized homophobia and self-esteem. Nungesser (1983) and Shidlo (1994) found that higher levels of internalized homophobia were correlated with lower levels of self-esteem and greater loneliness for gay men. Szymanski and Chung (2001) found similar results for lesbians. Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt (1998) found a negative correlation between internalized homophobia and self-esteem for gay men but not for lesbians. They suggested that internalized homophobia is not as closely related to self-esteem for lesbians as it is for gay men because there are stronger negative societal attitudes directed towards gay men that are internalized. Internalized homophobia, while present in the

vast majority of people who live in homophobic societies and capable of causing great discomfort and danger, is especially detrimental to the self-esteem of women who have not yet developed a comfortable and stable lesbian identity and are in the process of forming a lesbian identity (Sophie, 1987).

*Social support.* The internalized homophobia literature also shows a connection between internalized homophobia and social support. Generally, a negative correlation has been found, such that lower social support is associated with greater internalized homophobia. In a study specifically conducted with gay men, Shidlo (1994) found that the number of homosexuals who are part of a support system has a strong impact on levels of internalized homophobia. In this study, gay men with a large amount of social support, but relatively little social support from other homosexuals, had higher levels of internalized homophobia than individuals with larger gay support systems. Herek et al. (1998) found that both gay men and lesbians with higher levels of internalized homophobia experienced less of a sense of connectedness with the gay community. In particular, they found that internalized homophobia in lesbians is significantly inversely correlated with overall social support, satisfaction of social support, and overall gay social support. This study clarified that while social support is essential for the creation of positive lesbian identities, social support from other homosexuals is especially important. Downey and Friedman (1995) found that social support for lesbians is just as powerful, if not more powerful, than the effects of psychotherapy in terms of reducing internalized homophobia. Similar to Shidlo (1994) and Szymanski et al. (2001), Downey and Friedman (1995) found that relationships with other homosexuals is an essential form of social support. They found that integration into the lesbian and gay community often

effectively has the impact of lessening internalized homophobia and they recommend that clinicians encourage lesbian clients to seek out relationships in this community. The importance of involvement of the lesbian and gay community is further supported by findings that individuals with high levels of internalized homophobia tend to have no gay social support networks (Nungesser, 1983). Those who do have contact with a gay social support network generally have a high degree of separation between homosexual and heterosexual groups of friends (Nungesser, 1983). Women with a high degree of internalized homophobia often find it difficult to disclose their sexual attractions to both heterosexuals and homosexuals (Kahn, 1991).

Disclosing information about oneself opens the door to forming connections with other people. Therefore, a tendency to conceal one's sexual orientation understandably leads to isolation and lack of social support. Ross and Rosser (1996) believe that this tendency to withhold information about one's sexual orientation is related to the anticipation of a negative response rather than an actual response from disclosing. Since homosexuality is not a visible trait, it is fully an individual's choice if she or he would like to disclose information about her or his sexual orientation. Many people may choose to "pass" as heterosexual, and this decision certainly impacts the degree and level of social support that one has. In addition to a lack of disclosure, internalized homophobia is related to shorter length of relationships, lower satisfaction of relationships, and, for men, less sexual attraction to men and higher sexual attraction to women (Ross & Rosser, 1996).

*Psychological distress.* Internalized homophobia has also been correlated with overall psychological distress (Shidlo, 1994). Shidlo (1994) studied psychological

distress in terms of depression, somatic symptoms, self-esteem, loneliness, and distress. This study of gay men found that individuals with higher levels of internalized homophobia are more depressed, have more somatic complaints, have lower levels of self-esteem, are lonelier, and are more distrustful. In another study with gay men, those with greater internalized homophobia reported more symptoms of depression than those with less internalized homophobia (Nungesser, 1983). Similar correlations have been found in studies done with lesbian samples. Szymanski et al. (2001) found depression to be a significant predictor of internalized homophobia. Earle (1999) also found a significant correlation between depression and internalized homophobia. Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, and Rose (2001) found a positive correlation between internalized homophobia and dysphoria in both men and women. Herek et al. (1998) found significant negative correlations between internalized homophobia and depressive symptoms, demoralization, and self-esteem for gay men but not for lesbians.

*Body image.* Pitman (1999) studied internalized homophobia in relation to body image. She found internalized homophobia to be positively correlated with poor body image. Pitman posits that lesbians live within a heterosexual culture and are subjected to the same pressures to conform to certain feminine standards as heterosexual women, unless they reject the majority culture. Lesbians who experience more internalized homophobia, connect themselves to the larger heterosexual culture, steer away from homosexual culture, and continue to be influenced by the majority culture's ideals of beauty. Lesbians who reject the mainstream majority culture, which embraces unrealistic and unhealthy body ideals, are better able to maintain a healthy body image.

### *Expressions of Internalized Homophobia*

In addition to the many variables that correlate with internalized homophobia, the literature on internalized homophobia also includes a discussion of the various ways that internalized homophobia is expressed. Although there are many overt and obvious expressions of internalized homophobia that are easily noticed by all, there are also many ways in which internalized homophobia is expressed more subtly. These expressions are not as quickly connected to internalized homophobia because they are not as obvious.

*Subtle expressions of internalized homophobia.* Internalized homophobia is often expressed in subtle ways. While some individuals may overtly express strong feelings of hatred or shame about themselves or their sexual orientation, others may express unconscious feelings of homophobia in different ways. Some individuals may express that they want to protect others from the damage and pain that the news of their sexual orientation would cause them. This is an example of a subtle manifestation of internalized homophobia. Some may express discomfort with homosexuals who are stereotypical in appearance. Some may reject and put down all heterosexuals and some may feel superiority over heterosexuals and express over inflated gay pride. Others may take a sexuality-blind approach and deny that there is any difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Some may express discomfort with children being raised with homosexual parents. Others may only pursue heterosexuals or people of the same sex who are already in relationships. Individuals who get involved in relationships may only become involved in short-term relationships, which involve less social risk than long-term relationships (Margolies et al., 1987). These are all verbal and behavioral examples that exemplify more subtle expressions of internalized homophobia.



*Overt expressions of internalized homophobia.* Women who have a difficult time recognizing and reducing their internalized homophobia tend to manifest certain qualities that communicate the internalized homophobia to others. Women who question their sexual identity and who feel uncomfortable with their own feelings and fantasies and relationships with other women tend to harbor internalized homophobia. Women who encounter difficulties reducing their internalized homophobia continue to make negative comments about homosexuals, continue to use confrontational or apologetic tones while self-disclosing, continue to socialize with people who are homophobic, and do not take relationships with other women seriously (Sophie, 1987). Women with greater internalized homophobia tend to “pass” more frequently as heterosexual (Szymanski et al., 2001). Oftentimes, as one becomes more aware of the homophobia in society and the many ways that it is harmful, then anger and frustration are taken out through conflicts with people who live within the heterosexual culture. This may be seen as a working through of one’s internalized homophobia (Sophie, 1987). Individuals, most often men, may verbally harass and physically attack homosexuals as an expression of their own internalized homophobia.

#### *Reducing Internalized Homophobia*

Internalized homophobia may reside within individuals for an extended period of time. It may grow in strength, remain unchanging, or become smaller and less significant over time. The course of growth of internalized homophobia depends on the context in which one lives and one’s internal process of growth and change. Internalized homophobia may ebb and flow over time without a clear trajectory for many. Ideally, work towards acceptance of a homosexual sexual orientation will bring reduced

internalized homophobia, allowing greater self-acceptance and healthier relationships with others.

*Reduction of internalized homophobia as a process.* Reducing internalized homophobia is a process that takes place over a period of time. At first it may be difficult for women who are struggling with feelings of attraction towards other women to meet women who identify as lesbian, even though this social interaction could provide them with helpful social support. Feelings of internalized homophobia may lead women to project negative emotions they feel towards themselves, leading them to negatively view lesbians and to easily over-generalize from negative events that they have with lesbians (Sophie, 1987). Interactions with others consistently have a reinforcing or reducing impact on levels of internalized homophobia. Over time, as lesbianism slowly becomes regarded as something more ordinary, then generally internalized homophobia dissipates and becomes less of an active force. In addition to habituation, other potent factors have been associated with reducing levels of internalized homophobia. Sophie (1987) found that avoidance of a negative identity, increased self-disclosure, beginning to use an identity label, and socializing with lesbians may all act as a buffer and help to minimize levels of internalized homophobia.

*Signs of reduced internalized homophobia.* Women who have succeeded in lowering or eliminating their internalized homophobia tend to exhibit many changes that reflect a more positive sexual identity. These changes include increased comfort with their own feelings, greater comfort around other lesbians, more relationships with women, fantasies about lesbians, increased respect and admiration for lesbians and gay

men, more positive self-disclosures, and increased socializing with people who share positive feelings in regards to homosexuals (Sophie, 1987).

### *Limitations of Internalized Homophobia Studies*

There are many variables that have not been studied in relation to internalized homophobia that may lend a greater depth of clarity and understanding to this highly complex construct. A major limitation to many studies on internalized homophobia is the lack of racially and ethnically diverse lesbians that enter into the sample (Szymanski et al., 2001). Lesbians of diverse sociocultural backgrounds may experience internalized homophobia in a variety of ways and the way and the degree to which they express this internalized homophobia may differ as well. Since internalized homophobia is so closely linked to societal attitudes and beliefs it is highly likely that a conceptualization of this construct and the variables with which it correlates may change when sociocultural contexts are taken into consideration. Also, internalized homophobia has been theoretically connected to many variables such as lesbian battering and sexual dysfunction, but these connections have not yet been established empirically (Szymanski et al., 2001).

Overall, the literature on internalized homophobia has largely been established with gay males and that which has been written about lesbians is largely theoretical in nature. The measurement of internalized homophobia in a lesbian population is a more recent phenomenon. The body of literature that is based on gay men and lesbians points to the relationship between internalized homophobia and many psychologically oriented variables. Generally, homosexuals are psychologically healthier when levels of internalized homophobia are lower. They feel better about themselves and they are better

able to engage in healthier and more rewarding relationships with others. The research shows that higher levels of disclosure, social support from other homosexuals, and involvement in the lesbian and gay community are related to lower levels of internalized homophobia. The studies do not, however, show consensus regarding whether there is a particular order of people to whom one discloses. The research seems to indicate that internalized homophobia largely exists on an unconscious level initially and that it may be expressed in many forms: verbal and behavioral, subtle and overt. This process of reducing one's internalized homophobia may be long, arduous, and nonlinear, however ultimately it leads to better psychological well-being.

#### *Internalized Homophobia and Disclosure*

There is a direct link between disclosure of one's sexual orientation and internalized homophobia (Herek et al., 1998; Kahn, 1991; Ross & Rosser, 1996; Schope, 2002). Research to date has shown that higher levels of disclosure correlate with lower levels of internalized homophobia. Radonsky and Borders (1995) studied a lesbian population and found that levels of internalized homophobia are related to the number of people to whom one discloses. They found that lesbians with higher levels of internalized homophobia generally disclose their sexual orientation to fewer people. They did not find a relationship between levels of homophobia and a pattern of disclosure to people in particular categories (e.g., homosexual friends, heterosexual friends, family, and coworkers). Voisard (1995), on the other hand, found that internalized homophobia was strongly associated with disclosure to coworkers and employers, but not to friends or family. As levels of internalized homophobia decreased, comfort in disclosure of sexual orientation increased. Voisard stated: "Disclosure may be a useful behavioral marker of

movement toward acceptance and full identification of oneself as lesbian” (p. 59).

Kahn (1991) also found a relationship between disclosure and internalized homophobia. She wrote that “homonegativism in others and internalized homophobia affect the coming out process by lowering self-acceptance and negatively influencing one’s ability to disclose” (p. 49). In this study, lower levels of internalized homophobia were related to higher levels of comfort disclosing lesbian identity. Internalized homophobia may inhibit the process of disclosure of sexual orientation for lesbians (Kahn, 1991). Disclosure, the willingness and ability to openly share one’s lesbian identity with others, is closely related to internalized homophobia and social support, two factors that are essential to understanding lesbian identity and lesbian well-being (Szymanski et al., 2001).

In addition to low levels of internalized homophobia, lesbians with feminist attitudes experience higher levels of comfort disclosing than those without feminist attitudes. Kahn (1991) found that women with feminist attitudes are generally more open than more traditional women. She also found that women who hold more conservative beliefs in terms of women’s roles are less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Generally individuals who have a high amount of internalized homophobia do not feel very good about themselves, primarily because they are aware, or becoming aware, of their homosexual feelings and they may experience a range of negative emotions and cognitions in relation to themselves. It is understandable that an individual would not want to share a part of themselves with others of which they are ashamed or confused.

Miranda and Storms (1989) studied lesbians and gay men and found a relationship between greater self-disclosure and a more positive lesbian and gay identity. A positive

lesbian and gay identity was related to lower neurotic anxiety and higher ego strength and clearly implies lower levels of internalized homophobia.

In trying to understand the relationship between internalized homophobia and disclosure it is important to take into consideration many other contextual variables that impact this relationship. Shidlo (1994) concluded that an individual's comfort level in disclosing should be understood within a context as opposed to being related to solely one or two variables. He states that while disclosure is related to internalized homophobia, it is also related to a whole host of different environmental and personal variables that are important to take into consideration. Shidlo (1994) found that in addition to a correlation with internalized homophobia, disclosure is also related to homophobia in society, lack of civil rights protection, intolerance in certain professions, resilience to rejection based on homophobia, and a risk-taking personality type.

#### Religiosity

Religion and spirituality are closely tied to values that help many people define who they are and how they want to live in this world. These variables are widely studied from many angles inside and outside of academia. They have not, however, been studied much at all within the context of psychology (Hill & Pargament, 2003). In fact, the field of psychology seems to operate almost entirely separately from the fields of religion and spirituality. When religion and spirituality are studied within the context of a psychological study they have generally been included as ancillary variables (Hill & Pargament, 2003). The relative dearth of studies about religion and spirituality from a psychological perspective has led to a lack of understanding of how religion and spirituality impacts people's lives. Religion and spirituality are important aspects of the

lives of many Americans, even homosexual Americans. There are many homosexual Americans who maintain strong religious beliefs and who struggle to find a way to maintain their belief system and affiliation with their religious institution and gain or maintain a sense of pride and love for themselves as homosexuals. This is often a long and complex process that is highly individualized for religious homosexuals.

### *Stance of Different Religions Towards Homosexuality*

All of the dominant Western institutionalized religions are to some degree condemning of same-sex relationships. There are some organized religions that are gay-affirming, however they are very few. The vast majority of the literature that addresses religion is written for and about individuals involved in the Christian Church. As a generalization, churches tend to view homosexuality from three different perspectives: as sinful, as imperfect, and as natural (Haldeman, 1996).

Judeo-Christian religions have a history of fostering antigay oppression, rejection of homosexual relationships, and rifts between homosexuals and their families of origin (Clark, Brown, & Hochstein, 1990). Important texts that are shared by Christians and Jews, such as Genesis 1:27 and Leviticus 18:23 and 20:13 in the Five Books of Moses, are interpreted as condemnation of homosexuals. This type of interpretation is especially made by orthodox Jews and traditional Christians. Orthodox Judaism continues to view same-sex sexual relationships as a sin and a violation of nature, however the Reform and Reconstructionist movements have shown acceptance towards homosexuals and have ordained gay and lesbian rabbis. The Roman Catholic Church maintains that sex is only acceptable within the bounds of heterosexual marriage and for the purpose of procreation. Protestant denominations range from complete rejection of homosexuality to qualified

acceptance in which the individual is loved but the sin is despised. This view of homosexuality as imperfect embraces the notion that homosexuality is a “condition” and that those with this “condition” should try to heal themselves and in the meantime remain celibate. The Mormon Church believes views same-sex attraction to be perverted and dictates that such attractions should be suppressed. Islam, unlike most Christian denominations, views sexuality as a gift and discourages celibacy, however Islamic tradition is accepting only towards sexuality that is expressed within a heterosexual marriage (Davidson, 2000).

Outside of the religions and Christian denominations that condemn homosexuality there are certain religions and denominations that are tolerant and affirming of homosexuality. Four Christian denominations: the United Church of Christ, Integrity in the Episcopal Church, Dignity in the Roman Catholic Church, and Lutherans Concerned have tolerant views of homosexuality (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Quaker and Unitarian Universalists, two Protestant denominations, are among the few religious denominations that are fully gay-affirming and view homosexuality as natural (Davidson, 2000). These groups accept lesbians and gay men as equal members of their congregation and as church leaders, they allow lesbian and gay groups to use the church property for functions, and they sanction lesbian and gay relationships with a ceremony that has no legal ramifications (Haldeman, 1996). In addition to the few gay-affirming Protestant denominations, there are gay-affirming groups that are affiliated with some Jewish synagogues and the Roman Catholic Church (Haldeman, 1996). Many homosexuals who wish to maintain ties to a religious organization join the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a nondenominational gay-positive church with a homosexual



congregation, or other independent gay churches. MCC is the oldest and largest organization for homosexuals and bisexuals and supposedly the fastest growing religious organization worldwide.

### *Relationship Between Religion and Prejudice*

A relationship between religiosity and prejudice exists, however this relationship is qualified by many factors. There are several different variables that mediate the relationship between religion and antigay prejudice. Oftentimes people, especially homosexuals, have a tendency to quickly make the assumption that someone who is religious holds anti-gay bias and other prejudices. Since the relationship between religiosity and prejudice is a complicated one, it is essential to take into consideration a number of aspects related to these variables.

*Amount of religious involvement.* One variable to consider is amount of religious involvement. Many studies have shown that those who are more religiously active to be more prejudiced than those who are less religious (Allport & Ross, 1967; Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994). Allport and Ross (1967) found that those who attend church hold more racial, antisemitic, and ethnocentric prejudices than those who do not attend church. Fisher et al. (1994) found that individuals who attend church more frequently have higher levels of anti-gay prejudice.

*Religious Orthodoxy.* Another important variable to consider is religious orthodoxy. Generally followers of more conservative and orthodox denominations are less accepting of homosexuality. Those who interpret religious doctrine more literally are generally more condemning of homosexuality (Nungesser, 1983). Compared to heterosexual women, homosexual women are much less likely to believe that the Bible is

the word of God. Compared to heterosexual men, gay men are significantly less orthodox (Sherkat, 2002).

*Type of religion.* In addition to level of orthodoxy, the type of religion with which one is affiliated can have a significant impact on one's belief system because different religions teach different messages, especially regarding homosexuality. Generally, the more fundamentalist the group, the more anti-gay prejudice they embrace (Haldeman, 1996). The association between conservative religious beliefs and prejudice is stronger than the association between any particular religious orientation and prejudice (Herek, 1987). Fundamentalist Christian churches are a strong driving force behind political groups who lobby to make sure that homosexuals are not protected from discrimination based on their sexual orientation. They lobby against antidiscrimination policies for homosexuals because they believe that homosexuality is a choice and that homosexuals do not need to be protected since they have the freedom to choose to be heterosexual (Haldeman, 1996). Baptists, fundamentalists, and people who call themselves "Christians" generally tend to have stronger antigay prejudice than people who affiliate themselves with religions that are somewhat more gay-tolerant such as Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopalian (Fisher et al., 1994). Individuals with no religious preference have even less antigay prejudice than those who affiliate with more gay-tolerant religions (Fisher et al., 1994).

*Difference between an extrinsic and intrinsic orientation.* Allport and Ross (1967) began the discussion on extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to religion and researchers continue to utilize these variables today. They originally conceptualized extrinsic and intrinsic constructs as two ends of a continuum, and this has evolved over

time. The distinction between an extrinsic orientation and an intrinsic orientation vis a vis religion has been made in the literature to understand better the different ways that people use and embrace religion. An extrinsic religious orientation functions to help individuals meet certain needs. Individuals with an extrinsic orientation use their religion for self-serving goals such as social acceptance, status, and security (Allport & Ross, 1967). Those with an intrinsic orientation do not consciously or unconsciously seek secondary gain through religious involvement (Allport & Ross, 1967). Individuals with an intrinsic orientation have internalized religious messages such as “humility, compassion, and love of neighbor” and are able to use these values to make everyday decisions (p. 441). An intrinsic orientation to religion is correlated to a moderate degree with positive mental health indicators such as self-esteem, tolerance, self-control, and decreased anxiety and depression (Blaine & Crocker, 1995).

*Intrinsic orientation and prejudice.* The research on prejudice has incorporated extrinsic and intrinsic variables in order to understand better the relationship between religion and prejudice. An intrinsic approach has been associated with less prejudice than an extrinsic approach (Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson & Ventis, 1982). Allport and Ross (1967) investigated prejudice in relation to different ethnic groups. Herek (1987) further investigated the correlation between religious orientation and prejudice by investigating race and sexual orientation as separate variables. He found that individuals with an intrinsic orientation are generally more accepting and tolerant of groups of which their religion is tolerant, however they are generally as prejudiced or more prejudiced towards groups of which their religion is not tolerant. Individuals with an intrinsic orientation seem to be more tolerant of certain groups when their religion encourages tolerance

towards those groups. Herek (1987) found that individuals with an intrinsic religious orientation tend to be intolerant and hostile towards lesbians and gay men. This conclusion is quite different from the idea that previous research presented that an intrinsic religious orientation is correlated with overall higher tolerance levels. Fisher et al. (1994) found that individuals with a high intrinsic orientation to their religion generally harbor strong antigay sentiment and merely are outwardly tolerant. An intrinsic orientation to religion is associated with a theologically conservative belief system, and as noted before, conservatism is associated with prejudice (Herek, 1987).

*The Intrinsic – Extrinsic continuum reconceptualized.* Over time, the extrinsic and intrinsic constructs have been reconceptualized as two separate constructs with their own continuums. In addition to extrinsic and intrinsic constructs, nonreligious (low on both extrinsic and intrinsic) and indiscriminately proreligious (high on both) have been developed to further our understanding of religious orientation (Herek, 1987). Allport and Ross (1967) began to look at indiscriminately proreligious individuals and found them to be more prejudiced than those with an extrinsic orientation and significantly more prejudiced than those with an intrinsic orientation. Herek (1987) found that individuals who are indiscriminately proreligious tend to be prejudiced towards lesbians and gay men. He found a nonsignificant yet positive correlation between a nonreligious orientation and prejudice.

#### *How Many Homosexuals are Religious?*

There are no clear statistics on how many homosexuals are religious. The homosexual population is not one that can be measured since many have not begun the process of disclosure. Although it is unclear exactly how many homosexuals are

religious, it is clear that there are many homosexuals who belong to a religious institution and attend regularly (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). There are both gay men and lesbians who belong to many different religions and who are involved to varying degrees. In a comparison that took into account gender and sexual orientation, gay men were found to have the second highest level of religious commitment after heterosexual women. In addition, gay men were found to be significantly more active in their religious lives than lesbians and male heterosexuals (Sherkat, 2002).

Sherkat (2002) mentions that social factors are important forces to take into consideration when attempting to understand involvement of heterosexuals and homosexuals in religious institutions. He hypothesizes that male heterosexuals would be less involved in religion if there were fewer pressures from their wives and families to be active. He also states that homosexuals might be more involved in religion if more homosexuals had children and if there were fewer family conflicts related to homosexuality because religion tends to promote family ties. In addition, he discusses how lesbians in general are more questioning of patriarchal systems and rejecting of those that support the patriarchy. Since religion generally supports a patriarchal structure, lesbians are more likely to question religion and explore alternative religious movements and spiritual paths (Sherkat, 2002).

#### *Religiosity Versus Spirituality.*

Spirituality and religiosity are two distinct, yet related, ways to seek meaning in the world. The relationship between religiosity and spirituality continues to be debated, redefined, and clarified in academic contexts. A full discussion of this debate, however, is beyond the scope of this project. Religiosity and spirituality are seen as distinct, yet

overlapping concepts by many. Most Americans see themselves as being simultaneously religious and spiritual, although younger and more religiously marginal individuals do not see themselves this way (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Younger individuals tend to see themselves as being only spiritual or neither one of the two (Marler & Hadaway, 2002).

A major difference between spirituality and religion is locus of experience. While spirituality is often understood as being more focused on internal authority, individual experience, existential concerns, personal experience, and creative searching, religiosity is understood to be based more so on external authority, scripture, canons, creeds, and rituals. Spirituality corresponds more so with an intrinsic stance with religious beliefs and religiosity corresponds more so with an extrinsic stance (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Yip (2002) describes spirituality as “a self-based journey of exploration and construction” that “transgresses institutionality and gives primacy to the self” and religiosity as an “uncritical observance of rituals and conformity to traditional church teachings” that is “institution-based” (p. 209). Making the distinction between religiosity and spirituality is important for those who are considering abandoning or taking a different stance in relation to their religious faiths.

Spirituality offers space for homosexuals to reframe and maintain their previously held system of beliefs. Some homosexuals might embrace a sense of spirituality as a method of working through the conflict between religiosity and sexual orientation. Through spiritual explorations, experiences, and healing homosexuals may find a way to heal the pain was caused by unjust societal views of and opposition between religiosity and sexuality (Fortunato, 1982). A shift in perspective from a religious stance to a spiritual stance allows individuals to incorporate their sexual orientation, of which they

had previously been ashamed, into their identity. There is movement towards maintaining one's wholeness and away from sacrificing aspects of oneself. A spiritual outlook empowers individuals to hold onto beliefs that are important to their self-definition and to interpret life events in a manner that is most affirming to them. Homosexuals can alter how they construe events in their lives and begin to see their sexual orientation as a spiritual blessing (Barret & Barzan, 1996). In Yip's (2002) study of nonheterosexual Christians, the majority of the participants preferred the use of "spiritual" to "religious" as a description of their Christian experience. The distinction between religiosity and spirituality points out that there are multiple ways to conceptualize metaphysical experience and reduces the rigid tendency to either fully maintain one's religious stance or completely dispose of it.

#### *Shift in Authority*

Embracing a spiritual stance as opposed to a religious one encourages individuals to see the events in their own lives as a source of authority. As opposed to seeking an external authority, someone who is spiritual looks to herself as an authority and recognizes the power she holds within to effect changes in life (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Helminiak, 1989). Nonheterosexuals who continue to ascribe to a Christian faith are likely to shift the place of authority in the religion from an institutional level to a personal level (Yip, 2002). The nonheterosexuals in Yip's (2002) study did not highly regard religious authorities even though most of them attended church weekly. Their ability to secularize their religion, "detraditionalize", and listen to their own "inner voice" as opposed to an external authority figure, thus shifting the authority figure "from without to within", is what Yip explains to be the essence of what underlies their persistence of

faith. This study shows that there are many nonheterosexuals who do not abandon their faiths and that an important part of the psychological process that allows them to continue to practice and adhere to their religion is a movement away from compliance with external religious authority figures.

Many homosexuals who struggle to resolve a conflict between their religion and their sexual orientation eventually renounced calling themselves religious and began calling themselves spiritual (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Abandoning religion, though a drastic move for some, can be enormously liberating. Separating oneself completely from an external source of authority leaves one completely open to new discoveries as one begins to accept an internal authority (Barret & Barzan, 1996).

#### *Conflict Between Religion and Sexual Orientation*

The messages of intolerance towards homosexuality that are conveyed through many religious denominations pose difficulties for homosexuals who are or would like to be connected to some religious faith. As a result of the open condemnation of homosexuality in many religious denominations many homosexuals experience conflict between their religion and their sexual orientation. Consistent with the research previously mentioned that shows that more conservative beliefs are correlated with more anti-gay prejudice, lesbians who come from more conservative religious backgrounds are more likely to experience dissonance between their religion and sexuality (Mahaffy, 1996). Schuck and Liddle (2001) reported that two thirds of their gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants experienced conflict on some level between their religion and their sexual orientation. This suggests that the majority of homosexuals face a similar conflict at some point in their lives. Homosexuals facing this conflict often feel that they have a



limited choice: to either reject the church or suppress their homosexual attractions.

Involvement in a religious group that teaches intolerance towards homosexuals may delay or accelerate the process of coming to terms with one's sexual orientation. Religious individuals who are attempting to more fully understand and accept their attraction to people of the same sex may be disinclined to recognize their same-sex attractions or they may feel inclined to understand their attractions, to come out, and to integrate their sexuality into the rest of their identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Cass (1979) postulated that in the final stages of homosexual identity development there is a tendency to integrate sexuality into the other parts of one's identity. Individuals who face a conflict between religion and sexual orientation may sort these competing forces out in a variety of ways. While some homosexuals choose to abandon their religion, others reject particular religious teachings and attend more to others, some reject their homosexual identity and do all that they can to eradicate it, others compartmentalize their lives and maintain separate yet co-existing religious and homosexual identities, and yet others are able to somehow integrate both identities so that they are no longer separate.

Mahaffy (1996) identified three variables that predict who is more likely to use which strategy for resolving the conflict between religion and sexual orientation. This research, which was largely based on a cognitive dissonance model, examined three predictors: the source of dissonance, the age when a lesbian first identifies as Christian, and the age when she first identifies as lesbian. She found that lesbians who experience external dissonance (tension transmitted from people in their environment) are likely to abandon their religion or live with the discomfort and dissonance created by the conflict between their religion and sexual orientation. Lesbians who experience internal

dissonance (tension within themselves) will likely change some aspect of their belief system so that they no longer have to live with any discomfort and dissonance. Mahaffy found that lesbians who identify as Christians later in life and those who identify as lesbian earlier in life are more likely to better integrate and maintain dualistic religious and homosexual identities. They are able to synthesize these aspects of their identity and manage ongoing dissonance rather than trying to eliminate it.

*Abandonment of religion.* The most common response to conflict between religion and sexual orientation is an abandonment of religion (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Compared to heterosexuals, homosexuals are significantly more likely to leave their religion (Sherkat, 2002). In fact, about 62% of homosexuals do not feel that religion is an important part of their lives (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). The 1988 National Lesbian Health Care Survey (Bradford & Ryan, 1988) found that indeed many lesbians do abandon their religion over time. In the survey, 8% of the participants reportedly had no religious affiliation as children, yet 66% of the participants reported having no religious affiliation as adults. In a study conducted by Wagner et al. (1994) on gay men, almost three quarters of the community sample reported abandonment of their religion. Some are easily able to abandon their religion while others experience regret. Some individuals who abandon their religion begin to affiliate themselves with the cultural as opposed to the religious aspects of their faith, some follow a more spiritual path, and some affiliate themselves with a more gay-affirmative denomination. Individuals changing denominations tend to move from mainstream Catholic and Protestant denominations to gay-affirmative denominations or to religious organizations that are for

homosexuals such as the Metropolitan Community Church (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

*Rejection of particular teachings.* Not all individuals abandon their faith altogether. Instead of abandonment, some homosexuals choose to reject particular anti-gay religious teachings. Some may choose to reinterpret scriptural passages that most interpret as condemning of same-sex orientation and attend services less frequently (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Recently, a “gay theology” has been developed that places homosexuality in a positive and loving light (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Others may explore other faiths that are considered less mainstream within the United States such as atheism, Buddhism, neo-paganism, Zen, Wiccan, and Native American traditions (Barret & Barzan, 1996). The National Lesbian Health Care Survey found that many of their lesbian participants had shifted from a traditional religious upbringing to involvement in lesbian-affirmative religions (Bradford et al., 1997). These alternative paths may provide a way for individuals to heal and gain meaning in their lives that may have a semblance to the connections that they used to have with their original religion (Haldeman, 1996).

The process of searching for a resolution to the conflict between religion and sexual orientation often leads religious homosexuals to question external authority. Homosexuals may question the authority of the church, their family members, and others who have sent them messages that led them to undermine an unconditional love and acceptance of themselves. They will often eventually come to recognize the power of their own authority and thus come to determine themselves what is most self-affirming (Barret & Barzan, 1996).

*Rejecting a homosexual identity.* Individuals who feel same-sex attraction who have been brought up with the church, whose involvement in the church is a core part of their identity, and who highly value church acceptance may be likely to want to change their sexual orientation in order to continue to be accepted by the church and to find self-acceptance. There are many homosexuals who have suppressed their same-sex attractions and sought strength from their religion to overcome their same-sex desires (Barret & Barzan, 1996). Such individuals, who are deeply committed to their religious beliefs, may have experienced an unstable home environment and may have experienced a gay community that is intolerant towards religious individuals. These environmental qualities may act as forces that encourage such individuals to embrace the church as a place that offers comfort and reassurance that they have not found elsewhere (Haldeman, 1996). There are Christian-based approaches that claim to be able to help individuals who would like to convert to heterosexuality. These approaches, often referred to as “reparative therapy” have been extraordinarily controversial and continue to be contested and debated. Fundamentalist Christian groups offer a variety of different organizations such as Homosexuals Anonymous, Metanoia Ministries, Love In Action, Exodus International, and EXIT of Melodyland claim to help people with same-sex attractions to rid themselves of these “sinful” feelings and either adopt a heterosexual lifestyle or maintain celibacy. These groups have been wrought with problems that are extremely concerning. Their approach is found to be unethical by many and several groups have been found to have sexually abused their clients. A significantly high “success” rate for these groups is about 30%, meaning that most individuals are unable to change their sexual orientation. These individuals who are not “successful” in changing their sexual

orientation have to manage the psychological after effects of guilt, failure, shame, low self-esteem, anxiety, fear of homoerotic feelings, and conflict about sense of self (Haldeman, 1996). The theoretical base of these controversial conversion therapy programs is composed of subjective interpretations of scripture and outcomes are usually entirely measured by testimonials, which are offered in an environment in which social demand plays a significant role (Haldeman, 1996). Many individuals who have been through conversion therapy programs aimed at helping them to become "ex-gay" have gone on to join "ex-ex-gay" organizations in order to support each other and oppose conversion therapy programs.

*Compartmentalization.* Lesbians and gay men who feel strongly identified with both their religious identity and their sexual orientation identity may learn to compartmentalize by maintaining both of these identities and yet keep them separate from each other (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Constructing a barrier that maintains homosexuality as something that is separate from religiosity minimizes internal conflict. Some homosexuals keep these two pieces of their identity separate and do not integrate them because they may experience cognitive dissonance when the two identities come close to one another (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). This separation between sexual orientation and other aspects of one's life reduces the tensions and cognitive dissonance that might arise when one's sexual orientation does not comfortably fit with other aspects of one's life.

*Integration of sexual orientation and religious beliefs.* Several researchers have concluded that the ideal resolution for someone who struggles with a conflict between the antigay messages imparted to them through their religion is an integration of one's sexual

orientation and one's religion into the self (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Wagner et al., 1994). This is purportedly a healthier way to resolve the conflict than to reject one's sexual orientation and/or religion. Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, and Hecker (2001) recommend using a narrative perspective, which recognizes the ongoing deconstruction and construction of the stories that define our lives, in the process of integrating sexual orientation and religion into the self. Mahaffy (1996) hypothesizes that identity integration may predict an individual's ability to stand up against societal pressures. She points out that those who integrate both religious and homosexual identities are in fact able to withstand strong societal pressures to embrace only one of the two identities. Some homosexuals might embrace a sense of spirituality and through spiritual explorations, experiences, and healing they may find a way to heal the pain that has been caused by the unjust societal views of society and the opposition between spirituality and sexuality (Fortunato, 1982). Wagner et al. (1994) add that while an integration of one's religious faith and homosexuality may lead to healthy psychological well-being, some homosexuals may psychologically benefit from rejecting their religion all together. They point out that homosexuals who reject their religion may feel a sense of rebellion that leads to self-confirmation, acceptance, and reduced internalized homophobia.

Those who grapple with the struggle between sexual orientation and religion report certain resources that helped them resolve their struggle. People, books, and organizations were all found to be helpful to those engaged in such a struggle (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual friends were found to be the most helpful (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Heterosexual friends, family members, romantic partners, and professionals, such as therapists and clergy, were also found to be helpful, however to a

lesser extent. Mahaffy (1996) reported that participant involvement in therapy, reading stories about gay Christians, talking with other gay Christians, and regarding spirituality and religion as separate helped participants to resolve the tensions that existed between their religion and sexual orientation.

Rodriguez and Ouellette's (2000) studied lesbian and gay men involved in the Metropolitan Community Church of New York and found many different factors that were valuable in helping participants integrate their religion and sexual orientation. Approximately 75% of the participants in this study reported full integration between their religious identity and their sexual orientation identity. Many participants reported that involvement in their church was most helpful for their integration. For others, church involvement was not enough, and other factors such as knowledge, reading, education, accepting self, sense of completeness, spiritual reasons, the work of God, talking to others about their conflict, and maturity alone prompted them to integrate their religious and sexual orientation identity. Interestingly, those who reported greater integration were more disclosing of their sexual orientation in general and at work. Another aspect of this study that is interesting to note is that there was a much higher percentage of lesbians who reported being fully integrated than gay men. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) hypothesized that the women in the study had more integrated identities because they attended church more often than the gay men. They also mentioned that perhaps the lesbian pastor at the church and the gender-neutral language that the church used were influential to the women in their integration process. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) added that perhaps the women were better able to overcome the conflict between

religion and sexual orientation because they grew up dealing with the conflict between being female in a male-dominated church.

*Emotional responses to the conflict.* There are many different ways in which homosexuals emotionally respond to a conflict between religion and sexual orientation. Feeling turned away and shunned by one's religious community has led any homosexuals to feel guilt, shame, depression, and rejection (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Rejecting one's sexuality or one's religion, both central parts of identity for many individuals, may be seriously detrimental to one's self-esteem and sense of well-being. Helminiak (1989) posited that a correlation exists between acceptance of one's sexuality and one's self-esteem. Furthermore, there may be a correlation between self-esteem and spiritual development.

#### *Religiosity and Health*

Religion and spirituality are often heralded as sources of strength and stability for many. They are also often seen as constructs that provide meaning, a clearer sense, and motivation towards one's journey and destination in life (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Studies have in fact shown correlations between religiosity and spirituality and physical well-being (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Powell, Shahabi & Thoresen, 2003; Seeman, Dubin & Seeman, 2003). Other studies have linked religiosity and spirituality with greater psychological well-being (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Payne, Bergin, Bielema, & Jenkins, 1991; Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998). One way to understand how religiosity is related to psychological well-being is to see religiosity as a coping mechanism (Blaine & Crocker, 1995). For instance, religion can encourage a search for meaning, improve one's sense of control, and increase one's self-esteem, all of which enhance one's ability



to cope with different life events. Although most research points to a positive correlation between religiosity and psychological well-being, Hill and Pargament (2003) found that religiosity and spirituality have been correlated with both positive and negative physical and psychological health outcomes in empirical studies.

Blaine and Crocker (1995) studied the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being in relation to race and found support for a positive correlation with a Black population. They did not, however, find a positive correlation between religiosity and psychological well-being with a White population. They hypothesized that a positive relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being did not exist for the White participants because the participants were college students and they might devalue religion because religion is an important part of their parent's belief system. They found that psychological well-being was higher for White participants when the participants believed that others positively view their religion and not when they felt positively about their own religion. Blaine and Crocker (1995) further found that religiosity is significantly related to psychological well-being with a Black population, however the relationship is not a direct one. They found two mediating variables to link religiosity with psychological well-being in a Black population. The first mediating variable is when religiosity prompts Black individuals to make attributions (attempts to understand inexplicable events in the world by using their religious beliefs). The second mediating variable is when religiosity increases positive social identification (increased racial solidarity and racial identification with other Black individuals). Thus, religiosity is correlated with positive psychological well-being for Black individuals when it is used to make attributions and to socially identify in a positive way with other Black

individuals. Both of these mediating factors are independently related to psychological well-being.

None of these studies specify the sexual orientation of the sample. Therefore, the question remains as to whether or not these empirical results can be generalized to a homosexual population. Since homosexuals face obstacles to religious involvement that heterosexuals do not face, the results of the aforementioned studies cannot be automatically generalized to a homosexual population.

### *Religiosity and Internalized Homophobia*

Internalized homophobia and religiosity are two factors that are intimately related, yet they have not been studied much in relation to each other in the psychological literature. A link between internalized homophobia and religiosity is made clear by the measures of internalized homophobia that have been created. Both Nungesser's (1983) Homosexuality Attitudes Inventory and Szymanski and Chung's (2001) Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale recognize that religious attitudes towards homosexuality is an important dimension of internalized homophobia. Ross and Rosser (1996) found, through factor analysis, that religious attitudes towards homosexuality are one of four dimensions of internalized homophobia.

Wagner et al. (1994) examined the relationship between internalized homophobia and the integration of one's religion and sexual orientation. The authors postulated that individuals actively involved in the integration of their religion and their sexual orientation would have lower levels of internalized homophobia. This study, conducted with members of Dignity, an organization of Catholic homosexuals, did not find such results. The authors proposed that the members of Dignity had higher than average levels

of internalized homophobia before they joined Dignity and that their involvement in Dignity has somewhat helped lower their internalized homophobia. The authors also postulated that the participants may not have continued with their struggle to integrate their religion and their sexual orientation because they may have experienced “a false sense of conflict resolution” by maintaining an affiliation with the Catholic Church (p. 107).

#### *Importance of Evaluating the Intersection of Religiosity and Sexual Orientation*

It is certain that the messages and values that are taught within a religion will influence how an individual evaluates the world and her or himself, depending on the degree to which one is invested in one's religion. The messages and values that are taught and internalized may have a significant impact on innumerable factors in one's life. Religion interacts with sexual orientation and together they simultaneously influence the lives of lesbians. Morris, Waldo, and Rothblum (2001) found Jewish lesbian and bisexual women, in comparison with African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latina lesbians and bisexual women, were set apart on several different factors. The study found that Jewish lesbian and bisexual women participate more in the lesbian, bisexual, and gay community, they have the highest levels of self-disclosure, and they have the lowest levels of psychological distress and suicidality. Even though this is the only empirical study that has looked at Jewish lesbian and bisexual women thus far, it clearly shows that religion may play a significant role in the lives of lesbian and bisexual women. Future studies should look at the type and degree of impact that particular religions have on the lives of lesbian and bisexual women.

There is significant tension between religiosity and homosexuality in today's society. Since religious doctrine for the most part condemns homosexuality, the presence of religion in the lives of homosexuals often presents formidable challenges. These are challenges that render the relationship between religiosity/spirituality and homosexuals different from that of religiosity/spirituality and heterosexuals. Often, homosexuals are forced to reconcile these opposing forces by choosing between their religiosity/spirituality and their sexual orientation or by finding some way to integrate the two together. Integration of the various aspects of one's identity is hypothesized to be the ideal manner of resolving the conflict between sexual orientation and religiosity. The religiosity literature largely illustrates a positive relationship between religiosity and mental health, however the studies conducted have not investigated this correlation with a homosexual population.

### The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and psychological well-being in a lesbian population. The relationship between disclosure and internalized homophobia has been a part of the psychological literature for some time now, however most of the literature is based on studies with gay men. Not until very recently has there been a psychometrically sound measure of internalized homophobia available for use with empirical studies that was validated with a sample of lesbians. The relationship between religiosity and these other variables has very little empirical foundation in the literature. The question of how religion relates to variables such as disclosure and internalized homophobia has only begun to receive attention in the literature within the past decade. One study by Wagner

et al. (1994) directly looked at the relationship between internalized homophobia and religiosity and one study by Schope (2002) looked at the relationship between disclosure and religiosity. Both of these studies exclusively recruited gay men. Wagner et al. (1994) did not find a significant relationship between internalized homophobia and religiosity and Schope (2002) did not find a significant relationship between disclosure and religiosity.

Unlike previous research, this study will consider disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and well-being simultaneously using a lesbian population. This study will make use of the recently developed measure of internalized homophobia for lesbians. It will build upon the disclosure literature by using a recently developed behavioral disclosure measure in addition to a more traditional verbal disclosure measure. Additionally, this study will bring together and assess several different variables that have been discussed in the religiosity literature including: intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, and quest religious orientation. This study will investigate the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being for homosexuals, a relationship that has no precedent in the literature. This study will also investigate the relationship between religiosity and disclosure and the relationship between religiosity and internalized homophobia, two relationships that have not been previously studied with a lesbian population (see Figure 1).

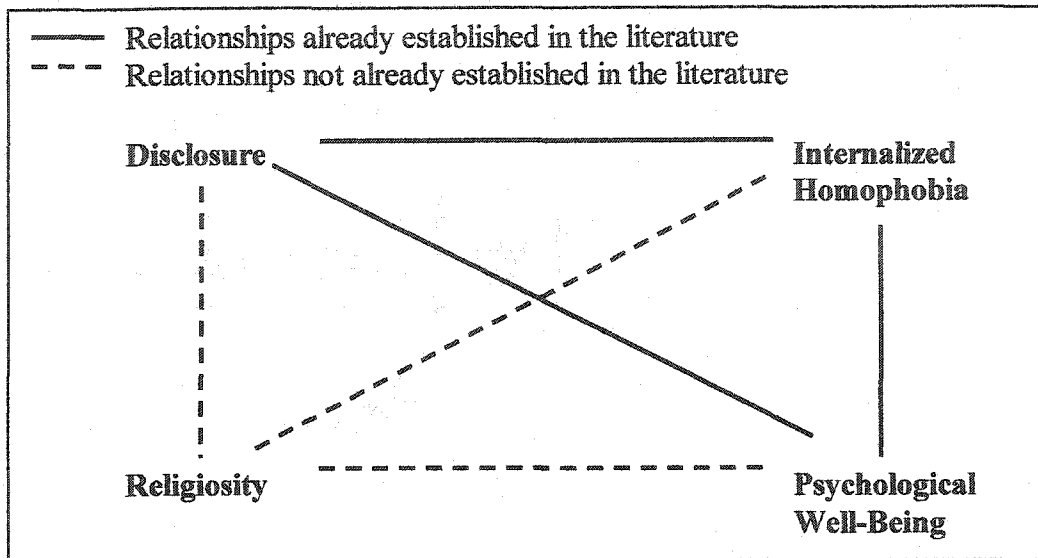


Figure 1. Depiction of the relationships already established in the literature versus those that have not yet been established.

The following hypotheses were considered:

- 1) An inverse relationship was expected between both disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and internalized homophobia.
- 2) An inverse relationship was expected between disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and religiosity (intrinsic and extrinsic).
- 3) Behavioral disclosure was expected to be higher than verbal disclosure for lesbians with high internalized homophobia and high religiosity (intrinsic and extrinsic).
- 4) An inverse relationship was expected between internalized homophobia and Quest religious orientation scores.
- 5) Several subscales of the psychological well-being measure were examined in

relation to other variables.

- a. Direct relationships were expected between purpose in life and intrinsic religiosity, self-acceptance and disclosure, and positive relations with others and disclosure.
- b. Inverse relationships were expected between autonomy and extrinsic religiosity, self-acceptance and internalized homophobia, and positive relations with others and internalized homophobia.

6) Integration between one's religion and sexual orientation were examined in relation to other variables.

- a. It was expected that greater integration between one's religion and sexual orientation would be positively related to disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and positively related to psychological well-being.

7) The overall relationship of disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity to psychological well-being was examined. Psychological well-being was expected to be directly related to verbal and behavioral disclosure and inversely related to internalized homophobia and extrinsic religiosity.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Participants

A total of 679 self-identified lesbians were recruited through the internet by asking “women who are attracted to women” over the age of 18 to fill out the online survey. There were 111 participants with missing data. Participants were asked to anonymously volunteer for the study. The primary mode of recruitment took place through listservs. An email describing the study and including information about how to access the online website where the study was hosted was sent out to approximately fifty listservs. Significant effort was put forth to access listservs for lesbian ethnic minority groups and religious groups. Additional recruitment was conducted through advertisements in gay newspapers and newsletters, emails to lesbian and gay social/political organizations, and friendship networks.

The informational letter located at the beginning of the online survey asked participants to pass along the letter, which included the website where the study was located, to others who meet the study criteria. This “snowball technique” allowed the primary researcher to access a wide range of potential respondents.

A compilation of all of the measures, including a demographics questionnaire created by this author, were posted on a website hosted by Psychdata.net. There were a total of 200 questions. Participants were assured that their anonymity was not being compromised. They filled out the surveys online and submitted them anonymously. Data were then subsequently downloaded from a remote secure website.



## Materials

A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) asked participants about age, race, income, state of residence, educational level, and partnership status, amount of time cohabitating with partner, degree of religiosity, religion raised and current religion, age of religious change if one occurred, degree of integration of sexual orientation and religion, and sexual orientation identification by label and on a continuum. Six different measures were used for this study: one measure of internalized homophobia, two measures of disclosure (behavioral indicators, verbal indicators), two measures of religiosity (quest religious orientation, intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation), and one measure of psychological well-being.

### *Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale*

Internalized homophobia was assessed with the Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale (LIHS; Szymanski & Chung, 2001) (see Appendix B). It is the first internalized homophobia scale standardized with a lesbian population and thus created to specifically measure internalized homophobia in lesbians. The LIHS consists of 52 items. Respondents use a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Many of the items are reversed scored to minimize response bias. The LIHS includes five subscales: (1) Connection with the lesbian community, (2) Public identification as a lesbian, (3) Personal feelings about being a lesbian, (4) Moral and religious attitudes toward lesbianism, and (5) Attitudes toward other lesbians. Construct validity was demonstrated by the significant correlations between the five primary subscales and measures of loneliness and self-esteem (Szymanski & Chung, 2001). Szymanski and Chung reported the internal consistency (alpha coefficient) for these

scales as: .87, .92, .79, .74, and .77 respectively. Inter-subscale correlations range from .37 to .57 and correlations between total and subscale scores have a range of .60 to .87. The alpha for the entire LIHS is .94 (Szymanski & Chung, 2001). In this study a coefficient alpha of .93 for the LIHS was obtained.

#### *Outness Inventory*

The Outness Inventory (OI; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000) (see Appendix C) was used to measure the degree to which participants are openly able to talk about their sexual orientation in the various areas/relationships in their lives. The OI consists of 11 items that pertain to the life areas that are applicable to many individuals such as family, employment, and religion. The OI consists of three subscales including: Out to Family, Out to World, and Out to Religion. The items are completed on a 7-point rating scale: 1 (*person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status*), 2 (*person might know about your sexual orientation status, but it is never talked about*), 3 (*person probably knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is never talked about*), 4 (*person probably knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is rarely talked about*), 5 (*person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is rarely talked about*), 6 (*person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is sometimes talked about*), and 7 (*person definitely knows about your sexual orientation, and it is openly talked about*). Alpha coefficients for the three subscales are: Out to Family (.74), Out to World (.79), and Out to Religion (.97). The alpha coefficient in this study was .92 for the overall Outness Inventory.

### *Behavioral Self-Disclosure Questionnaire*

The Behavioral Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (BDQ; Carroll & Gilroy, 2000) (see Appendix D) was used to measure the behavioral and indirect ways that lesbians disclose their sexual orientation. It is the first scale to measure the behavioral aspects of the coming out process and to attempt to operationalize a behavioral language. The BDQ consists of 31 items. Respondents use a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*). The scale includes six subscales that were determined through factor analysis: (1) Out to family/friends, (2) Out in general public and at work, (3) Out through suggestive conversation/art/books, (4) Out in the gay community, (5) Out through gay symbols, and (6) Out financially. The reliability coefficients for these scales respectively are: .92, .87, .84, .71, .66, and .69. The alpha for the entire BDQ is .94. The alpha in this study was .93. All of the six factorially derived subscales are positively correlated with verbal disclosure. The correlations for these six scales, with the verbal Sexual Orientation Disclosure Scale that was created by Shachar and Gilbert (1983) and revised by Jordan and Deluty (1998), are .45, .49, .51, .34, .17, and .55 respectively (Carroll & Gilroy, 2000).

### *Scales of Psychological Well-Being*

The Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB; Ryff, 1989) (see Appendix E) were used to measure psychological well-being in the participants. Ryff (1989) created the measure in order to add a theoretically grounded measure to the psychological well-being literature, which had done little previously to define what psychological well-being actually means. Previous to Ryff's measure, the literature on psychological well-being focused on short-term affective well-being. Ryff's measure operationalizes six

dimensions of psychological well-being that are quite enduring. The SPWB has several forms with 20-item, 14-item, 9-item, and 3-item scales. This project will make use of the 9-item scales, which has an overall number of 54 items. Respondents use a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The SPWB consists of six subscales including: (1) autonomy, (2) environmental mastery, (3) personal growth, (4) positive relations with others, (5) purpose in life, and (6) self-acceptance. The alpha coefficients for the 9-items scales from Ryff's Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (N=5,009) of midlife adults are respectively .72, .75, .78, .80, .76, and .82. Alpha coefficients for the 9-item scales from a longitudinal study that Ryff is currently conducting have been collected at four different times over a period of two years. The coefficients include: autonomy (.72, .75, .79, .73), environmental mastery (.75, .80, .81, .77), personal growth (.78, .78, .79, .83), positive relations with others (.81, .82, .84, .85), purpose in life (.71, .76, .75, .75), and self-acceptance (.82, .82, .84, .83). The alpha coefficient in this study was .93.

#### *Age-Universal Intrinsic-Extrinsic Scale, Amended*

The Age-Universal Intrinsic-Extrinsic (I-E) Scale, Amended (Maltby & Lewis, 1996) (see Appendix F), was used to measure intrinsic and extrinsic orientation towards religion. This scale was chosen for use especially because it allows for measurement of religiosity with religious and non-religious samples. Allport and Ross (1967) created the first I-E measure called the Religious Orientation Scale. Gorsuch and Venable (1983) then revised this scale so that it would be applicable to adults and children. Kirkpatrick (1989) found that the I-E scales cannot be used with respondents that are non-religious. Researchers who use an I-E scale are vulnerable to having many of the respondents not

respond to scale items. Maltby and Lewis (1996) took Kirkpatrick's observations into consideration and amended the Age-Universal I-E Scale so that both religious and non-religious respondents would be able to respond to the items. Eight of the items load on an Intrinsic factor and 12 of the items load on an Extrinsic factor, contributing to an overall 20-item scale. Revised from the older 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), Maltby and Lewis's version consists of a 3-point scale that includes 1 (*no*), 2 (*not certain*) and 3 (*yes*). Maltby and Lewis (1996) changed the instructions, the response format, and the wording of one item. Six different adult sample groups were used to standardize the measure. Two groups from the United States were used (one from North Carolina and one from Ohio University). Two groups from England were used (one young adult group, one older adult group). Two groups from Ireland were used (one from Northern Ireland, one from the Republic of Ireland). The internal consistency (alpha coefficient) for the groups' amended intrinsic items are respectively .87, .90, .88, .88, .91, and .90. The internal consistency (alpha coefficient) for the groups' amended extrinsic items are respectively .89, .88, .82, .83, .90, and .89. The reliability coefficient for the groups' amended intrinsic items are respectively .86, .87, .83, .87, .87, and .88. The reliability coefficient for the groups' amended extrinsic items are respectively .87, .88, .80, .81, .89, and .87 (Maltby & Lewis, 1996). The alpha coefficient for the overall scale in this study was .86. Separate alpha coefficients were also calculated specifically for the Extrinsic items (Alpha = .76) and the intrinsic items (Alpha = .84).

The wording of several of the items was modified in order to be as inclusive as possible towards the religiously heterogeneous population that may respond to this

measure. The word “church” was replaced by “place of worship”, the word “God” was replaced by “God/higher power”, and the words “Bible study group” were simplified to “study group”.

*Quest Religious Orientation Scale, Amended*

The Quest Religious Orientation Scale, Amended (Maltby & Day, 1998) (see Appendix G), was used to measure how much religion is translated and encourages an open-ended questioning stance about society and life. This scale was also chosen for use especially because it allows for measurement of religiosity with religious and non-religious samples. Batson (1976) introduced the concept of Quest into the literature as a way to add another dimension to the way that religion is conceptualized and measured beyond the Intrinsic and Extrinsic dimensions. The Quest scale has undergone several changes over the years in order to improve psychometric properties. Batson and Ventis (1982) converted the Quest concept into a 6-item scale. Batson and Schoenrade (1991a,b) revised the original 6-item scale and based it on three factors. The three factors correspond to three subscales that include complexity, doubt, and tentativeness. Complexity refers to one’s ability to conceptualize existential questions and maintain the complexity of the questions. Doubt refers to one’s perception of self-criticism and religious doubt as something positive. Tentativeness refers to the tendency to be tentative and open to changes in one’s belief system. Each factor has 4 items, contributing to an overall 12-item scale. Maltby and Day (1998) amended the Quest scale in order to allow the scale to be amenable to religious and non-religious individuals. Maltby and Day (1998) changed the instructions, the response format, and the wording of 2 items. All of these changes were made to make the scale more applicable and accessible to non-

religious individuals. Revised from the older 9-point scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*), Maltby and Day's version consists of a 3-point scale that includes 1 (*no*), 2 (*not certain*) and 3 (*yes*). The internal consistency (alpha coefficient) for the revised version of the Quest scale is .79, higher than the .71 internal consistency for the original scale. The alpha coefficient in this study was .89. The internal reliability for the original and revised version is .70 (Maltby & Day, 1998). The wording of one item was modified in order to be as inclusive as possible towards the religiously heterogeneous population that may respond to this measure. The word "God" in this item was replaced by "God/higher power".

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### Overview of Analyses

Pearson correlations were conducted on the first five hypotheses. These analyses determined the nature of the relationship between disclosure and internalized homophobia, disclosure and religiosity, internalized homophobia and religiosity, and verbal disclosure and behavioral disclosure. These analyses also determined the nature of the relationships between psychological well-being and religiosity and psychological well-being and disclosure. A Pearson correlation was also conducted to determine the nature of the relationship among integration of religiosity, disclosure, and internalized homophobia. A multiple regression was conducted for the last hypothesis. Psychological well-being was used as the criterion variable and verbal disclosure, intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and internalized homophobia served as predictor variables.

#### *Missing Data*

The data from all of the participants were used in the analyses. Participants did not have a consistent response rate across all sections of the survey. Noticeably the Outness Inventory (OI) and the Behavioral Disclosure Questionnaire (BDQ) were missing quite a bit of data. For these measures, it was decided to use participants' scores if they had a certain number of responses. For the verbal disclosure scale, if participants had data for at least two of the subscales, the overall OI was calculated. For the behavioral disclosure aggregate variable, which corresponds to the BDQ, if participants endorsed at least half of the items, the aggregate mean score was calculated. These



procedures resulted in 58 participants with missing data on the verbal disclosure measure and 147 participants with missing data on the behavioral disclosure measure. A high number of participants had missing data for the psychological well-being scale (109) and the verbal disclosure subscale “out to religion” (388).

### Profile of Sample

Data were collected from 679 participants who filled out the online survey. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 years old. A summary of importation demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1. Details on demographic characteristics are presented below. The majority of the participants fell between the ages of 20 and 50 years (82.4%). There were nearly equal numbers of participants between the ages of 20 and 29 (29.8%), 30 and 39 (27.6%), and 40 and 49 (25%). There were fewer below the age of 20 (5.7%), and above the age of 49 (11.1%). The mean age of the sample was 35 years ( $SD = 11$ ). Women from almost every state in the country filled out the online survey as well as women from other countries (3.1%).

On the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked to identify their sexual orientation on a Likert scale from 1 to 10 on which 1 was “exclusively heterosexual”, 5 was “bisexual”, and 10 was “exclusively lesbian”. Lesbians were operationalized as those who selected numbers 8 through 10, bisexuals as those who selected 4 through 7, and heterosexuals as those who selected 1 through 3. Although the majority (78.6%,  $n = 534$ ) of participants identified as lesbian, about one-fifth (20.2%,  $n = 137$ ) identified as bisexual, and a very small percentage (1.2%,  $n = 8$ ) identified as heterosexual. All subjects were used for analyses and an additional set of analyses were conducted on lesbians only. Because the analyses with the lesbian only sample produced similar results

Table 1

*Sample Demographic Information*

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>%</u>
Age	35 years	
20-50		82.4
Below 20		5.7
Above 49		11.1
Geographic Region		
South		34.3
New England		19
Middle Atlantic		13.5
Midwest		8.2
Northern Plains		.7
Location		
Suburban		43
Urban		39.3
Rural		17.7
Race		
Caucasian		85.3
Multiracial		4.1
African American		3.2
Hispanic		2.5
Other		2.1

Table 1 (cont.)

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Asian American	1.9
Native American	.9
Education	
College graduate (4 year)	31.5
Graduate school	22.8
College graduate (2 year)	18.1
High school	16.1
Postgraduate training	10.8
Less than high school	.7
Relationship Status	
Committed relationship and living with partner	41.5
Not in relationship	25.2

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to the analyses with the total sample, only the analyses for the total sample are reported.

The Southern region was the most highly represented (34.3%,  $n = 233$ ), with the greatest number of participants from Virginia ( $n = 100$ ). Other highly represented regions were New England (19%,  $n = 129$ ), the Southwest (17.8%,  $n = 121$ ), and the Middle Atlantic (13.5%,  $n = 92$ ). The Midwest (8.2%,  $n = 56$ ), Northwest (3.2%,  $n = 22$ ), and Northern Plains (.7%,  $n = 5$ ) were less represented regions. There was a greater percentage of participants from suburban (43%,  $n = 292$ ) and urban (39.3%,  $n = 267$ ) areas that responded to the survey than those from rural areas (17.7%,  $n = 120$ ).

The vast majority (85.3%,  $n = 579$ ) of participants described themselves as White. The other participants described themselves as Multiracial (4.1%,  $n = 28$ ), African American (3.2%,  $n = 22$ ), Other (2.1%,  $n = 14$ ), Hispanic (2.5%,  $n = 17$ ), Asian American (1.9%,  $n = 13$ ), and Native American (.9%,  $n = 6$ ).

About one-third (31.5%,  $n = 214$ ) of the participants were college graduates from 4-year colleges. The other participants graduated from graduate school (22.8%,  $n = 155$ ), 2-year colleges (18.1%,  $n = 123$ ), high school (16.1%,  $n = 109$ ), postgraduate training programs (10.8%,  $n = 73$ ), and a small percentage of participants (.7%,  $n = 5$ ) did not complete high school.

For those women who participated in the study the median annual income level range was \$30-40,000. Participants ranged from earning less than \$10,000 a year (19.1%,  $n = 130$ ) to earning more than \$70,000 a year (9%,  $n = 61$ ).

In terms of relationship status, the two largest groups were those who were in committed relationships and living with their partners (41.5%,  $n = 282$ ) and those who were not in any relationship (25.2%,  $n = 171$ ). The remaining participants shared that

they were in committed relationships although not living with their partners (13.5%,  $n = 92$ ), dating one person exclusively (10%,  $n = 68$ ), and dating casually (9.7%,  $n = 66$ ).

Overall, the respondents identified themselves as less religious and more spiritual. On a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating high levels of religiosity, a mean score of 3.0 was obtained ( $SD = 1.82$ ). An identical scale used to measure spirituality revealed a mean score of 5.0 ( $SD = 1.68$ ).

Whether or not the participants were more religious or more spiritual seemed to change throughout their lives. Approximately two-thirds (68.3%,  $n = 464$ ) of the participants who reported an affiliation with some religion (other than 'no religion' or 'spiritual but not religious') also reported that the religion they were raised is different from the religion that they are now. About one-third (31.7%,  $n = 215$ ) of the sample reported that the religion they were raised is the same as the religion they are now (see Table 2). Most notably, a significant number of participants became primarily spiritual over time, a significant number of participants abandoned religion altogether over time, significantly fewer participants identify as Catholic, and significantly fewer participants identify as Christian and as Protestant.

#### Integration of Sexual Orientation and Religion

In terms of integration between sexual orientation and religion in the lives of the participants, most did not feel that they had to choose sexual orientation over religion or vice versa. More than half (64.5%,  $n = 438$ ) of the participants reported that they did not choose to adhere to their religion and disregard their sexual orientation. A small percentage of the participants (10%,  $n = 68$ ) were neutral in regard to this issue, an even smaller percentage (3.4%,  $n = 23$ ) agreed their religion is more important than their

Table 2

*Summary of Religious Orientation Shift*

Orientation	Raised	Now
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Spiritual	14	216
No religion	54	122
Catholic	201	52
Christian	105	62
Protestant	166	43

sexual orientation, and about one-fifth (22.1%,  $n = 150$ ) of the sample did not respond to this question.

Just under half (46.7%,  $n = 317$ ) of the participants reported that they did not abandon their religion in order to feel validated with their sexual orientation. However, about one-fifth (18.6%,  $n = 126$ ) of the participants reported that they have, in fact, abandoned their religion because of their sexual orientation. A small percentage (13%,  $n = 88$ ) of participants were neutral in response to their question and about one-fifth (21.8%,  $n = 148$ ) of the sample did not respond to this question.

Just under half (44.9%,  $n = 305$ ) of the participants reported that they have not compartmentalized sexual orientation and religion in their lives, although there were a small percentage (14.4%,  $n = 98$ ) of the participants that reported that they have engaged in compartmentalization. About one-fifth (18.1%,  $n = 123$ ) of the sample responded neutrally to this question and about one-fifth (22.5%,  $n = 153$ ) of the sample did not respond to this question.

More than one quarter (39.2%,  $n = 266$ ) of the participants reported that they have integrated their religion and sexual orientation, while about one quarter (23.6%,  $n = 160$ ) reported that they have not integrated their religion and sexual orientation. A small percentage (15.8%,  $n = 107$ ) of participants were neutral in response to their question and about one-fifth (21.5%,  $n = 146$ ) of the sample did not respond to this question.

#### Descriptive Data for the Dependent Variables

There were seven aggregate variables measured in this study: psychological well-being, internalized homophobia, quest religious orientation, intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, verbal disclosure, and behavioral disclosure (see Table 3

for a list of Means and Standard Deviations of these dependent variables and their corresponding subscales). In general, the sample of women who participated in this study reported high levels of psychological well-being, low levels of internalized homophobia, and high levels of verbal and behavioral disclosure. Participants also reported moderate levels of religiosity.

When subscale scores for the verbal disclosure measure were considered, participants had similarly high levels of outness to “family” as they did to “world”. More than half of the sample, however, did not respond to the items related to being out to “religion” or found them to be not applicable. Those who did respond to those items indicated that there is one sizeable group of participants (16.1%,  $n = 109$ ) that are out to the members and leaders of their religious community, another sizeable group (9.8%,  $n = 67$ ) that are not out, and smaller groups that are somewhere in between those two poles. On the psychological well-being measure participants showed overall high levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It is notable that 109 participants were not included in these computations because they did not respond to a significant number of items on this measure.

### Main Analyses of Hypotheses

As a result of the large number of correlations in the main analyses, it was necessary to adjust the alpha for this study. For approximately 22 correlational analyses, a Bonferroni correction was used resulting in an alpha for significance of .001. An inverse relationship was expected between disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and internalized homophobia. Pearson correlations revealed that internalized homophobia



Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Seven Dependent Variables*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Range</u>
Psychological well-being	4.83	.66	1-6
Subscales:			
Autonomy	4.85	.78	1-6
Environmental mastery	4.50	.92	1-6
Personal growth	5.19	.59	1-6
Positive relations with others	4.85	.90	1-6
Purpose in life	4.85	.82	1-6
Self-acceptance	4.74	.96	1-6
Internalized homophobia	2.01	.68	1-7
Intrinsic religious orientation	1.73	.57	1-3
Extrinsic religious orientation	1.56	.39	1-3
Quest religious orientation	1.95	.59	1-3
Verbal disclosure	5.03	1.44	1-7
Subscales:			
Out to family	5.10	1.62	1-7
Out to world	5.05	1.53	1-7
Out to religion	4.68	2.43	1-7
Behavioral disclosure	3.85	.70	1-5

was inversely related to verbal disclosure  $r(619) = -.67, p < .001$  and inversely related to behavioral disclosure  $r(530) = -.73, p < .001$ .

An inverse relationship was expected between disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and religiosity (intrinsic and extrinsic). Pearson correlations revealed no relationship between intrinsic religiosity and verbal  $r(589) = -.05, p > .001$  or behavioral disclosure  $r(516) = -.03, p > .001$ . Similarly, no relationship was found between behavioral disclosure and extrinsic religiosity  $r(516) = -.07, p > .001$ . Verbal disclosure was inversely related to extrinsic religiosity,  $r(589) = -.14, p < .001$ .

Behavioral disclosure was expected to be greater than verbal disclosure for the study's participants. A Pearson correlation revealed that behavioral disclosure is highly correlated with verbal disclosure,  $r(530) = .68, p < .001$ . Using standardized scores to compare measures, 57.5% of respondents had scores above the mean on verbal disclosure and 56.2% of respondents had scores above the mean on behavioral disclosure. These results demonstrate the similarity between behavioral disclosure and verbal disclosure in this sample.

An inverse relationship was expected between internalized homophobia and Quest religious orientation scores. Internalized homophobia and Quest were positively related  $r(589) = .11, p > .001$ . Internalized homophobia was also positively related to intrinsic religiosity  $r(589) = .10, p > .001$ , extrinsic religiosity  $r(589) = .17, p < .001$ , and the overall measure of religiosity  $r(589) = .14, p < .001$ .

Several predictions were made regarding the psychological well-being of the participants. Specific subscales of the Well-Being measure were correlated with religiosity and disclosure. Positive correlations were expected between purpose in life

and intrinsic religiosity, self-acceptance and disclosure, and positive relations with others and disclosure. No relationship was found between purpose in life and intrinsic religiosity  $r(568) = .02, p = .59$ . However, positive relationships were found between self-acceptance and both verbal  $r(568) = .24, p < .001$  and behavioral disclosure  $r(499) = .20, p < .001$ . Similarly, positive relations with others was found to have positive relationships with both verbal disclosure  $r(568) = .27, p < .001$  and behavioral disclosure  $r(499) = .22, p < .001$ . Inverse relationships were expected between autonomy and extrinsic religiosity, self-acceptance and internalized homophobia, and positive relations with others and internalized homophobia. Inverse relationships were found between autonomy and extrinsic religiosity  $r(568) = -.12, p > .001$ , self-acceptance and internalized homophobia  $r(568) = -.35, p < .001$ , and positive relations with others and internalized homophobia  $r(568) = -.39, p < .001$ .

Integration between one's religion and sexual orientation was examined in relation to other variables. It was expected that greater integration between one's religion and sexual orientation would be positively related to disclosure (verbal and behavioral) and positively related to psychological well-being. One item on the demographic questionnaire asked participants about the degree to which they feel that they have integrated their sexual orientation and their religion. This item was correlated with the aggregate disclosure variable and the aggregate psychological well-being variable. This analysis revealed that integration between religion and sexual orientation is positively related to disclosure  $r(487) = .17, p = .001$  and positively related to psychological well-being  $r(443) = .10, p > .001$ . Additionally, disclosure is positively related to psychological well-being  $r(568) = .32, p < .001$ .

The overall relationship of disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity to psychological well-being was examined in order to understand better if any of these variables are predictive of psychological well-being. Higher levels of disclosure (verbal and behavioral), lower levels of internalized homophobia, and lower levels of religiosity (extrinsic and intrinsic) were expected to predict psychological well-being.

A multiple regression analysis was done with internalized homophobia, verbal disclosure, intrinsic religiosity, and extrinsic religiosity as the predictor variables and psychological well-being as the criterion variable. As a result of problems with collinearity, behavioral disclosure was removed as a predictor variable. The remaining predictor variables were significantly associated with psychological well-being,  $F(4,565) = 35.4, p < .001$ , accounting for 20% of the variance in psychological well-being.

Analyses of the individual predictor variables revealed that internalized homophobia, intrinsic religiosity, and extrinsic religiosity accounted for unique variance in psychological well-being. Information regarding these significant predictor variables is listed in Table 4. Participants who reported lower internalized homophobia, higher intrinsic religiosity, and lower extrinsic religiosity also reported better psychological well-being. When considering this analysis, it is important to recognize that verbal disclosure was strongly correlated with internalized homophobia. Therefore, the lack of a significant effect for verbal disclosure is likely related to its high correlation with another predictor variable.

Table 4

*Regression Analysis Summary for Significant Predictor Variables*

Variable	<u>B</u>	<u>SEB</u>	<u><math>\beta</math></u>	<u>r</u>
Internalized homophobia	-.40	.05	-.41***	-.44***
Verbal disclosure	.01	.02	.02	.31***
Intrinsic religiosity	.13	.05	.11*	-.01
Extrinsic religiosity	-.20	.08	-.12*	-.12**

Note.  $R^2 = .20$  ( $N = 569$ ,  $p < .001$ ).  $r$  is correlation with psychological well-being.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$  \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Additional Analyses

Additional analyses examined the potential relationship between religiosity and several demographic variables. A General Linear Model (GLM) procedure was utilized to examine differences in psychological well-being, religiosity, disclosure, and internalized homophobia as a function of respondents' rural, suburban, and urban location. Internalized homophobia varied significantly by participant location,  $F(2,630) = 9.91, p < .001$ . Dunnett C post-hoc analyses revealed that participants from suburban locations reported significantly more internalized homophobia compared to participants from urban and rural locations,  $p < .05$ . Behavioral disclosure also varied significantly by participant location,  $F(2,529) = 5.35, p < .01$ . Participants in suburban locations reported significantly less behavioral disclosure compared to those in urban and rural areas,  $p > .001$ . No significant differences were found in levels of psychological well-being or religiosity based on rural, suburban, and urban location. Means and Standard Deviations for all dependent variables that were analyzed across location type are listed in Table 5.

One question that arises in samples that include both lesbians and bisexual women is the degree to which these groups are similar or different on variables of interest. Independent sample  $t$  tests revealed that lesbian respondents reported greater verbal disclosure  $t(167.9) = -6.29, p < .001$ , behavioral disclosure  $t(125.3) = -4.75, p < .001$ , and psychological well being  $t(179.5) = -2.11, p < .05$  and lower levels of internalized homophobia  $t(170.6) = 6.07, p < .001$  compared to bisexual participants. Means and standard deviations for the variables included in these independent-samples  $t$  tests are

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Seven Dependent Variables Across Rural, Suburban and Urban Locations*

Variable	Rural			Suburban			Urban		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
IH	1.84 <sub>a</sub>	.53	111	2.13 <sub>b</sub>	.73	272	1.94 <sub>a</sub>	.65	50
BD	4.00 <sub>a</sub>	.62	87	3.74 <sub>b</sub>	.78	238	3.90 <sub>a</sub>	.60	207
VD	5.09 <sub>a</sub>	1.34	109	4.87 <sub>a</sub>	1.49	267	5.18 <sub>a</sub>	1.43	245
DIS	4.58 <sub>a</sub>	1.05	109	4.29 <sub>a</sub>	1.11	267	4.56 <sub>a</sub>	1.03	245
PWB	4.87 <sub>a</sub>	.62	102	4.81 <sub>a</sub>	.63	249	4.83 <sub>a</sub>	.70	219
IR	1.73 <sub>a</sub>	.53	102	1.77 <sub>a</sub>	.58	258	1.68 <sub>a</sub>	.57	231
ER	1.58 <sub>a</sub>	.39	102	1.59 <sub>a</sub>	.38	258	1.53 <sub>a</sub>	.40	231
REL	1.66 <sub>a</sub>	.41	102	1.68 <sub>a</sub>	.43	258	1.60 <sub>a</sub>	.44	231

Note. IH = Internalized Homophobia, BD = Behavioral Disclosure, VD = Verbal Disclosure, DIS = Disclosure, PWB = Psychological Well-Being, IR = Intrinsic Religiosity, ER = Extrinsic Religiosity, REL = Religiosity. Means in the same row that have different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  by Dunnett C comparisons.

listed in Table 6. No significant differences were found between the lesbian and bisexual groups in terms of religiosity.

Other analyses were conducted to further look at the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being. Results revealed significant inverse relationships between religiosity and the subscales of the psychological well-being measure. Extrinsic religiosity was negatively correlated with autonomy  $r(568) = -.12, p < .01$ , environmental mastery  $r(568) = -.09, p < .05$ , personal growth  $r(568) = -.17, p < .001$ , and purpose in life  $r(568) = -.11, p < .01$ . In summary, four out of six subscales on the psychological well-being measure had significant negative correlations with the measure of extrinsic religiosity.

Further consideration of the correlations conducted earlier between several subscales from the Psychological Well-Being measure and several of the dependent variables examined in this study revealed overall trends that are important in the context of this study. These trends inform us about clear directional relationships between psychological well-being and five of the dependent variables examined in this study. All six subscales of the Psychological Well-Being scale have significant positive relationships with both verbal and behavioral disclosure variables, significant negative relationships with internalized homophobia, and no relationships with intrinsic religiosity. Additionally, there are some small yet significant negative correlations between psychological well-being and extrinsic religiosity (see Table 7 for correlations between psychological well-being subscales, religiosity, disclosure, and internalized homophobia).



Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations for Four Dependent Variables When Comparing Bisexuals and Lesbians*

Variable	Bisexuals			Lesbians		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
IH	2.35	.73	123	1.92	.64	505
BD	3.54	.65	86	3.91	.69	443
VD	4.27	1.54	121	5.23	1.35	495
PWB	4.72	.64	115	4.86	.66	451

Note. IH = Internalized Homophobia, BD = Behavioral Disclosure, VD = Verbal Disclosure, PWB = Psychological Well-Being.

Table 7

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Psychological Well-Being Subscales and Religiosity, Disclosure, and Internalized Homophobia*

Subscales	ER	IR	VD	BD	IH
Purpose in Life	-.11**	.03	.23***	.19***	-.31**
Self-Acceptance	-.07	.02	.24***	.20***	-.35***
Positive Relations With Others	-.07	-.05	.27***	.22***	-.39***
Autonomy	-.12**	.01	.25***	.26***	-.36**
Environmental Mastery	-.09*	-.02	.28***	.25***	-.34**
Personal Growth	-.17***	.00	.17***	.14**	-.29**

Note. ER = Extrinsic Religiosity, IR = Intrinsic Religiosity, VD = Verbal Disclosure, BD = Behavioral Disclosure, IH = Internalized Homophobia.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The overall intention of this study was to understand better the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and psychological well-being for lesbians. Over the course of conducting this study there have been history-making changes on the state and federal level offering rights and ensuring protections to homosexuals. Federal sodomy laws have been overturned, same-sex marriage has been legalized in Canada, the position of bishop in the Episcopal church was offered to a gay man, and the Supreme Court of Massachusetts has ruled in favor of same-sex marriages allowing for same-sex marriages to take place in the United States for the first time in history. While these historic and unprecedented changes have been taking place, strong opposition has led to a backlash that has included the creation of legislation in most states that prohibits same-sex couples from gaining access to the benefits that come with marriage. The most public and vocal opposition to the battle for these rights and benefits is the face of religion. There have, however, been many religious leaders from less conservative religious branches that have spoken out in support of gay rights. The mixed public image regarding the relationship between religiosity and gay rights creates a need to better understand how religion impacts the lives of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. This study sought to further this understanding by investigating the relationship of religiosity and spirituality to the psychological well-being of lesbians.

Several recently created measures were used in this research that improved upon previous measures in terms of reliability, validity, theoretical grounding, applicability to wider groups of people, and innovation. These measures were used in this study to

capture a more accurate and relevant picture of the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and psychological well-being is in the lives of lesbians. For example, a recently created measure of psychological well-being with a strong theoretical base was used in the study. Disclosure and internalized homophobia were included in the study since only a few studies have looked at those variables in relationship to religiosity and these studies were conducted with gay men. One of the main intentions of this study was to expand the psychological research on lesbians since such a relatively small amount of the literature has focused on or been inclusive of lesbian populations. In general, relatively little research has been conducted with a homosexual population compared to a heterosexual population, and the majority of that research has been conducted on gay men. Additionally, a new behavioral disclosure measure and a new internalized homophobia measure validated on a lesbian population were used in this study.

#### Disclosure and Internalized Homophobia

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate further the relationship between disclosure and internalized homophobia in a lesbian population. Up until now, these two variables have primarily been examined within a gay male population and subsequently generalized to a lesbian population. Previous research has demonstrated that greater disclosure is correlated with less internalized homophobia for both men and women (Kahn, 1991; Ross & Rossner, 1996; Herek et al., 1998; Schope, 2002; Szymanski & Chung, 2001). The results of this study replicated this correlation and furthermore demonstrated that greater verbal and behavioral disclosure were both significantly associated with less internalized homophobia.

### Disclosure and Religiosity

Another purpose of this study was to understand better the relationship between disclosure and religiosity in a lesbian population. It was expected that disclosure would be negatively associated with religiosity since so few religions are affirming of homosexuality and many discourage individuals from pursuing this lifestyle and discussing it with others. More conservative religions may teach that homosexuality is something to feel shameful of since it is sinful and therefore one should not share these feelings with others. The results of this study did not support this hypothesized relationship. In fact, behavioral disclosure was not related to either intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity. Verbal disclosure was not related to intrinsic religiosity, but was inversely related to extrinsic religiosity. That is, study respondents who reported greater verbal disclosure also reported less extrinsic religiosity. This may indicate that the women in this study who speak about their sexual orientation openly with others in their lives are less likely to attend religious services for secondary gain such as social acceptance. This is consistent with an earlier finding by Schope (2002) who also did not find a strong relationship between religiosity and disclosure. He only found that participants who were more religious were significantly less likely to disclose to parents. No other significant relationships were found between religiosity and the other groups of people listed in his disclosure measure. Schope (2002) measured disclosure with a questionnaire that asked whether participants were "not open", "open", or "very open" to parents, siblings, friends, at school, at current workplace, at previous workplace, and in the neighborhood. Schope (2002) did not mention whether the measures he used were statistically reliable and valid. Together, this study and Schope's (2002) study do not support the expected hypothesis that level of religiosity is strongly related to level of disclosure. There does

seem to be some relationship between level of religiosity and level of disclosure, although the relationship is limited in scope. Perhaps these findings suggest that level of religiosity does not matter as much as the particular religious denominations to which individuals belong and the particular beliefs espoused by those denominations.

### Verbal Versus Behavioral Disclosure

One intention of this study was to broaden our understanding of the construct of disclosure as it relates to sexual orientation. Most typically in psychological research the construct of verbal disclosure is used, which involves verbally conveying information about one's sexual orientation to others. A recent measure of behavioral disclosure introduced the idea that researchers could also be paying attention to ways that lesbians communicate their sexual orientation through their behaviors (Carroll & Gilroy, 2000). This study sought to examine the relationship between verbal and behavioral disclosure to see if additional information could be obtained from using two disclosure measures. The results of this study revealed that verbal and behavioral disclosure were highly correlated suggesting significant overlap in constructs. Carroll and Gilroy (2000) similarly found a significant moderate correlation ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) between behavioral and verbal disclosure. Although behavioral disclosure may seem to be conceptually distinct, the results of this study do not support such a separation of the constructs. Based on these results, using one or the other measure appears adequate for future research.

### Internalized Homophobia, Quest, and Overall Religiosity

Another purpose of this study was to investigate further the relationship between internalized homophobia and religiosity in a lesbian population. The constructs of internal and external religiosity were used to examine religiosity in this study. An extrinsic orientation relates to individuals who use their religion for self-serving goals

such as social acceptance, status, and security. An intrinsic orientation relates to individuals who do not consciously or unconsciously seek secondary gain through religious involvement, but rather those who have internalized religious messages such as humility and compassion (Allport & Ross, 1967). It was expected that internalized homophobia would be positively related to intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity in light of the frequent negative messages that individuals receive about homosexuality through religious organizations, communities, and the documented inner conflict that arises between religion and an emerging lesbian sexual orientation (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Another reason why it was expected that internalized homophobia would be related to religiosity is because two very commonly used internalized homophobia measures utilize religiosity as one of the subscales (Nungesser, 1983; Szymanski & Chung, 2001). This study found that internalized homophobia is indeed positively related to extrinsic religiosity and the overall measure of religiosity. The correlations are significant, although rather small in size. Thus, there is some relationship between participants who identify as being more religious and higher levels of internalized homophobia. The results were different from those found in the only previous study that investigated the relationship between these two variables, conducted by Wagner et al. (1994). Wagner et al. (1994) did not find significant correlations between religious beliefs or behaviors and internalized homophobia. This differs from the findings from this study that indicate that more internalized homophobia is indeed connected to higher levels of extrinsic religiosity and overall levels of religiosity. Perhaps this difference is a function of the sample used because Wagner et al. (1994) studied gay men while this study focused on lesbians. This difference may also be due to the fact that Wagner et al. (1994) surveyed members of a

gay Catholic organization while this study surveyed a much more religiously diverse group. In addition to investigating the relationship between internalized homophobia and intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity in a lesbian population, a Quest religious orientation was also investigated. A Quest religious orientation relates to religion prompting individuals to have an open-ended questioning stance about society and life. It was expected that internalized homophobia would be negatively correlated with Quest religious orientation. Since Quest religious orientation reflects a questioning stance towards religion and a tendency towards thinking critically, analyzing and deconstructing the role of religion in one's life it was assumed that participants with high Quest religious orientation would be more likely to turn that critical reflection upon themselves and deconstruct the information that feeds into internalized homophobia. It was also hypothesized that perhaps participants who are more questioning and doubtful in the face of religious beliefs would also be either nonreligious or would adhere to less conservative religions and would therefore have less internalized homophobia. The data did not support these predictions. The results of this study showed that internalized homophobia and Quest religious orientation were positively related, although this relationship was not significant. It is possible that individuals who hold a questioning stance towards religion do not transfer this stance towards other aspects of their lives. The items related to questioning and doubting one's religious convictions are perhaps interpreted by participants in such a way that the questioning and doubt is seen as a means of showing greater devotion to one's religion. Future research could investigate the hypothesis that Quest is in fact reflective of less or more religious adherence by giving this measure to



individuals who are more fundamentalist and may therefore be more unchanging in the realm of their religious convictions.

The overall results of this study indicate that higher levels of internalized homophobia are related to higher levels of extrinsic religiosity, quest, and overall religiosity. In fact, the Quest variable was strongly correlated with both Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientation and does not seem to offer a highly differentiated construct. The correlations between internalized homophobia and these three religious orientations are statistically significant, although rather small in magnitude. It is possible that the correlations were small because of a confounding between religiosity and spirituality. There is probably a continuum of participants ranging from those who are religious to those who are spiritual and those in the middle who are simultaneously religious and spiritual. It could be concluded that while religiosity has some influence on the presence of internalized homophobia there are other variables that are more influential on the presence of internalized homophobia, especially in a population of lesbians in which the mean is a moderate level of religiosity and half of the respondents report being nonreligious.

### Psychological Well-Being and Other Variables

#### *Disclosure and Psychological Well-Being*

An important part of this study is to understand how a variety of salient variables in the lives of lesbians are related to their overall psychological well-being. Therefore, psychological well-being was examined in terms of its relationship with all of the other variables in this study. First, psychological well-being was studied in relation to disclosure. This study found significant correlations between both verbal and behavioral

disclosure and psychological well-being. These findings are consistent with previous research in which greater disclosure predicts psychological health (Morris et al., 2001). This study found that a linear combination of verbal disclosure, internalized homophobia, intrinsic, and extrinsic religiosity are related to psychological well-being and that verbal disclosure does not account for unique variance in psychological well-being. Perhaps there is a synergistic relationship between verbal disclosure and psychological well-being in that one stimulates growth of the other. For instance, once a woman begins to gain a greater sense of self-acceptance of herself as a lesbian she might be more likely to come out to her close friends. This disclosure might stimulate more positive relations with her friends and personal growth from feeling more confident and secure with her sexual orientation. This confidence and security and sense of support from friends may continue to build and eventually contribute to further disclosures to others in her life.

The literature on disclosure places a particular emphasis on the impact of disclosure on social relationships (Berger, 1990; Bradford & Ryan, 1987; Cain, 1991; Caron & Ulin, 1997; Derlega et al., 1993; Jordan & Deluty, 2000; Kahn, 1991). This emphasis in the literature indicates the importance of social relationships and the presence of social support networks in determining psychological well-being. The measure of psychological well-being used in this study suggests that disclosure is related to one's sense of purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth. This study takes one step beyond previous research in terms of looking at psychological well-being by using Ryff's (1989) measure of psychological well-being that offers us a greater depth and theoretical basis for the construct.

There is the tendency to conclude from the results of this study that the more one

discloses the more one will experience psychological well-being. First, the results are correlational in nature and therefore we cannot conclude a cause and effect relationship. As Jordan and Deluty (1998) noted, lesbians with higher levels of disclosure report less anxiety, greater self-esteem, and greater positive affectivity, yet it is possible that all of these variables are preexisting and enable greater disclosure. Second, understanding the significant relationships between verbal and behavioral disclosure and psychological well-being means recognizing that disclosure is not happening indiscriminantly, but rather with smart, painstaking, and sometimes laborious decision-making efforts that involve verifying that the benefits will outweigh the risks (Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Carroll & Gilroy, 2000; Derlega et al., 1993; Harry, 1993; Morris, 1997; Wells & Kline, 1987). Certainly we should not overlook the reality that disclosure may lead to negative consequences such as rejection, loss of integrity, loss of control (Omarzu, 2000), verbal and physical harassment (Herek et al., 1999) and is not always the best decision.

#### *Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being*

Psychological well-being was also studied in relation to religiosity. Overall this study did not find any strong relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being. No relationship was found between intrinsic religiosity and psychological well-being, although both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity were found to be associated with psychological well-being. Intrinsic religiosity is associated with greater psychological well-being while extrinsic religiosity is associated with less psychological well-being. These results do not corroborate the results found by Blaine and Crocker (1995) indicating that intrinsic religiosity is correlated with positive mental-health indicators. The differences between this study and Blaine and Crocker's (1995) study may be related

to sample difference. Blaine and Crocker found a positive correlation between intrinsic religiosity and positive mental-health indicators in a black heterosexual population while the participants in this study are predominantly white lesbians. Another way to understand the difference in findings is to look more closely at the subscales of the psychological well-being measure used in this study. Perhaps they do not capture the psychological and emotional changes that may occur as a result of a stronger intrinsic religious orientation such as peace and understanding about oneself and the world. It is also possible that because the religious and spiritual experiences of the participants in this study were so varied the intrinsic religiosity items are connected to different meanings depending on the particular religion and set of spiritual beliefs.

Some small relationship was found between extrinsic religiosity and psychological well-being. This may be because individuals who attend religious services for social acceptance and status experience a sense of dependence on others for fostering their own personal well-being that they are not sufficiently invested and self-reliant on taking care of their own needs. This is especially reflected by higher extrinsic religiosity being related to less personal growth, less environmental mastery, and less of a sense of purpose in life. It is also possible that the participants in this study with high extrinsic religiosity are putting their energy towards having a greater sense of social connectedness in their religious communities and therefore are not gaining other benefits that would improve their overall psychological well-being.

#### *Internalized Homophobia and Psychological Well-Being*

Finally, psychological well-being was studied in relation to internalized homophobia. As expected, more internalized homophobia is connected with less

psychological well-being. In fact, more internalized homophobia is connected with less psychological well-being on all six subscales. Similarly, alone and in combination with verbal disclosure, intrinsic, and extrinsic religiosity, greater internalized homophobia was associated with less psychological well-being. This finding replicates past research that has found a relationship between internalized homophobia and psychological distress (Nungesser, 1983; Shidlo, 1994; Herek et al, 1998; Earle, 1999; Lewis et al., 2001; Szymanski et al., 2001).

### Integration Between Religion and Sexual Orientation

The existing research that looks at both religion and sexual orientation is largely dedicated to investigating the ways in which individuals resolve the oftentimes conflict-ridden struggle of being both religious and embracing of homosexuality and the ways in which they reduce the cognitive dissonance that results from this struggle. Integration of one's religious beliefs and one's sexual orientation is one of the ways mentioned in the literature that individuals resolve this conflict. The other ways in which individuals resolve this conflict that are primarily mentioned in the literature are abandoning religion, compartmentalizing religion and sexual orientation, and choosing one over the other.

Since so many of the participants in this study did not identify as religious it makes sense that one-fifth of the participants did not respond to items pertaining to the resolution of this conflict. What is less clear is why so many participants responded "neutral" to this set of questions. It is perhaps because these participants are still struggling with the existence of religion in their lives and they have not yet resolved this conflict. It is also possible that participants did not feel that they have chosen one of these methods, but rather feel that to some degree they engage in several or all of the methods.

In this study most participants did not report choosing religion over sexual orientation, about a fifth abandoned their religion, a little less reported engaging in compartmentalization, and about 40% reported that they have integrated both. It was expected that more integration would result in more disclosure and psychological well-being. The results of this study revealed that indeed more integration leads to more disclosure. The relationship between integration and disclosure is significant, although rather moderate. The relationship between integration and psychological well-being is not significant. Integration is important in relationship to disclosure and psychological well-being although the picture is evidently more complex. There are most likely many factors in addition to integration that contribute to individuals engaging in disclosure and experiencing a sense of psychological well-being. It may also be true that participants found other ways besides integrating their religion and sexual orientation to resolve any conflict that may exist between them. Perhaps a resolution was reached through a change in denomination to one that is less conservative and more accepting and affirming of homosexuality, a change to identifying as "spiritual", or integrating more spirituality into one's religious beliefs. The majority of participants in this study did in fact report affiliating with a religion that is different from the one with which they were raised. Overall there were significantly fewer participants affiliating with the more conservative religions and more identifying as "spiritual", with less conservative religions, and with women centered groups such as Pagan and Wiccan.

#### Area of Residence

The results of this study showed that lesbians from urban and rural areas reported greater behavioral disclosure and less internalized homophobia in comparison with

lesbians who live in suburban areas. These results are somewhat contrary to the pattern of disclosure found by Schope (2002) that revealed greater disclosure by gay men living in urban areas and less disclosure by lesbians living in suburban and rural areas. It was presumed that lesbians from urban areas would have the highest levels of disclosure based on previous research and anecdotal information. It was surprising, therefore, to find that lesbians living in rural areas reported levels of disclosure similar to those of lesbians living in urban locations. It is possible that the difference in findings can be attributed to the fact that the participants in Schope's (2002) study were exclusively men and the participants in this study were exclusively women. Schope (2002) found that homosexuals who grow up and remain in a suburban setting are more likely to remain closeted than those who move to a more urban setting. It is also possible that the women in this study living in suburban areas have grown up and remained in suburban areas and are therefore more closeted and have higher internalized homophobia, as Schope (2002) suggests. Another way to understand these results is to consider that the lesbians from rural areas that participated in this study reside in communities that have relatively sizeable and well-organized lesbian communities. The existence of even a small insular lesbian community in a small town may create enough of a sense of safety for women to come out and establish themselves as part of the lesbian community. Women's music festivals, online communities, pride events may provide lesbians with places to connect with other lesbians outside of their communities, thus reducing their sense of isolation and increasing their support and sense of confidence in themselves.

### Methodological Limitations

Since the internet was used as the medium by which participants were recruited for this study it is important to consider the ramifications that this may have had on the study. Primarily, a sample of lesbians recruited via "snowball technique" on the internet does not provide a random sampling of the lesbian population. In fact, at this point in time there is no adequate way to gain a random sample of the lesbian population since not all lesbians are comfortable disclosing their lesbian identity to others and nor do all lesbians identify to the same degree with the label "lesbian" or the lesbian community. Compounding the sampling issue even further is the fact that the use of the internet as a medium for the survey limits the access of the survey to lesbians who do not have computers and limits the response rate of lesbians who are not proficient and comfortable with computer use. The primary researcher did, in fact, receive several emails and phone calls from women who were interested in participating in the study, yet needed some coaching through the process of accessing the survey online. Furthermore, similar to most studies that have been done with a lesbian population, the majority of the participants were white and well-educated (Morris & Rothblum, 1999). In addition to being predominantly white and well-educated, the participants in this study were generally high functioning. They reported high levels of psychological well-being, low levels of internalized homophobia, and high levels of disclosure. As a result, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the lesbian population at large and should only be understood within the context of the group of women who participated in this study.

One problematic result of conducting an online survey is that participants may complete only a portion of the online survey. Nearly one-sixth of the participants did not



complete the psychological well-being measure, presumably because it is the last measure presented in the online format and participants tired of completing the study. On a similar note, because the measures were presented in a fixed order, each participant viewed and filled out the measures in a similar order. This may have created order effects that have impacted the results of the study.

One complication that arose as the study was being conducted was related to defining the parameters of who would participate in the study. In an effort to navigate around the potential problem of lesbians not participating in the study because they do not identify with a label for their sexual orientation, the phrase "women attracted to women" was used in the solicitation letter. The ambiguity of that phrase allowed for interpretation and as a result there were a good amount of women who identified as bisexual who chose to participate in the study. Since a few of the measures in this study were specifically geared to and validated on a lesbian population many of the bisexual women who participated in this study emailed the primary researcher and communicated that they were uncertain about their eligibility to participate after having viewed the wording on the measures that use the term "lesbian" or chose not to participate because they felt the study was not appropriate for them. Furthermore, women who participated in the study who identify as queer or somewhere outside of the continuum of sexual orientation provided for them in the demographic questionnaire were forced to identify themselves on the provided continuum and thus represent themselves in a way that they may not consider accurate.

One of the main concerns that this study presented was the lack of ability to distinguish between the construct of religiosity and the construct of spirituality. Many of

the individuals who participated in this study clearly distinguish between religiosity and spirituality. This study did not assess religiosity and spirituality equally. Two of the six measures were measures of religiosity and there were only two questions on the demographics questionnaire that allowed participants to identify their spirituality.

The religiosity measures themselves are problematic and some of the responses leave room for interpretation. Although the scales are supposedly accessible to individuals who are religious and those who are not, there is ample room for ambiguity in the responses. Participants who respond "1" to the questions may be responding that they are not endorsing the item because they are not religious or because they are religious and the item does not reflect their particular religious beliefs and practices. As a result, low responses to the measure may be understood as either a reflection of a low level of religiosity or a reflection of an absence of religiosity. This ambiguity presents some dilemmas in terms of distinguishing those participants who are religious from those who are not. At the time of this research there were no religiosity scales that were validated on a homosexual population and in fact the religiosity measures used in this study were the only ones found that could be utilized in studies where a significant percentage of the participants are expected to be nonreligious. These religiosity measures used in this study only assess religiosity and do not tap into spirituality. It is unclear from the literature whether religiosity and spirituality exist as two totally separate constructs.

The psychological well-being measure presented some concerns that were identified by some of the participants through informal email communications with the primary researcher. Several participants pointed out that their responses to the psychological well-being measure were driven almost entirely by the presence of a

chronic illness in their lives. They expressed that feeling that their sense of psychological well-being was compromised because of their chronic illness and not because of their sexual orientation. These communications helped me to clarify that a score on the psychological well-being measure may be reflective of variables that were not identified in this study.

#### Directions for Future Research

Although the results of this study indicate that since the constructs of behavioral disclosure and verbal disclosure overlap to such a great extent and thus measures of both need not be used simultaneously, the use of a behavioral disclosure measure should not be altogether discounted. There may be a place for the use of behavioral disclosure measures in samples of lesbians where behaviors are more prominent than verbalizations. For instance, this may hold true for younger women who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to many and are just beginning to come out. Since the behavioral disclosure measure is relatively new certainly further research on the best uses of the measure are further warranted.

This study took one step beyond what previous research had offered by investigating the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being in a lesbian population. Religiosity was looked at with the current constructs of intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest religious orientations that were offered from current literature on religiosity. These constructs provided a lens through which religiosity could be studied. Future research that focuses on the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being would do well by explicitly differentiating between religions that are tolerant of homosexuality and those that are not and studying the differential impact that varying

religions have on psychological well-being. In order to move one step beyond what this study had to offer, future researchers should pay particular attention to adherence to conservative religious groups rather than to purely look at level of religiosity. It is important to distinguish between an individual who is religious and an individual who is religiously conservative. While religious conservatism may be equated with level of religiosity in some religions, this may not be the case with others. There is a lot of diversity in religious communities and also within particular denominations and future researchers should be attentive to this. Future research should take a more specified approach to studying religion and its relationship with psychological well-being in a lesbian population so that specific religions are examined and the particular subgroups within the religion. Future research conducted on lesbians and religiosity should be clear in differentiating between spirituality and religiosity and how those terms are being defined.

Variables such as religiosity, spirituality, and disclosure are complex variables that warrant future research. While this study attempted to gain a better understanding of these variables and their relationship to each other, the quantitative measures used placed limitations on the degree to which these variables could be investigated. Future researchers would benefit from using qualitative designs to investigate these variables in order to further tap into the richness and complexity of these variables.

In terms of research design, researchers who investigate sexuality in conjunction with other variables could build upon simply seeking correlational data. Researchers should attempt to implement longitudinal research designs that look at cause and effect

relationships. Understanding cause and effect relationships would move research on sexual orientation one step further and would offer more direct clinical implications.

There is still work to be done in terms of furthering an understanding of how lesbians engage in conflict resolution around being religious/spiritual and gay. Future research could use qualitative methods to try to understand what particular experiences lead women to choose a certain type of resolution (e.g., abandonment of religion, becoming more spiritual, changing religious denominations) to the conflict they experience between religiosity and sexual orientation.

Since most studies on the lesbian population, including this study, utilize samples that are predominantly white it may be safely stated that the existing research does not reflect the experience of all lesbians. Research at this current time does not have much information to offer about the lesbian lives of lesbians of color (Greene, 1994). As research on gay men cannot be extrapolated to lesbians, research on white lesbians cannot be extrapolated to lesbians of color. In fact, the existing literature on Black gay men and lesbians have noted the strong presence of homophobia in the black communities (Icard, 1986; Collins, 1990; Poussaint, 1990; Mays, Cochran & Rhue, 1993). These cultural differences strongly suggest that research on lesbians of color will yield a different picture than do studies on predominantly white lesbians. For this reason, future researchers should make a concerted effort to include lesbians of color in their sample or should shape the focus of their research to be on lesbians of color.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study on the relationship among disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and psychological well-being in a lesbian population was conducted with the context of an actively changing political and social climate. This study utilized up to date measures and examined how these four variables are interrelated today in the lives of lesbians. The impact of religiosity on the psychological well-being of lesbians had not been previously empirically studied. Over the past several years the lives of gay men and lesbians have become more visible to the public eye and scrutinized more carefully since the battle for gay rights have moved to a more central place in the country's sociopolitical arena. It is especially important to continue to learn more about gay men and lesbians at the current time since the popular image of gay men and lesbians is that of an aberrant marginalized group, an image that is not at all accurately reflective of the diverse demographics of the group. It is mainly the conservative religious right that has taken a strong oppositional stance to gay rights, which contributes to the importance of understanding how religion impacts the lives of lesbians.

Disclosure, internalized homophobia, and psychological well-being are other variables that play an important role in the lives of lesbians and should therefore be included in empirical studies. The participants in this study found that the more verbal and behavioral disclosure they engaged in the less they experienced internalized homophobia. Verbal and behavioral disclosure were found to be so highly related that using one or the other measure in future research would be adequate. Overall there was

no strong relationship found between disclosure and religiosity. Behavioral disclosure was not found to have a relationship with either intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity. On the other hand, while verbal disclosure was not related to intrinsic religiosity it was inversely related to extrinsic religiosity. Although no strong relationship was found between disclosure and religiosity, a strong relationship was found between internalized homophobia and both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Higher religiosity (intrinsic, extrinsic, and Quest religious orientation) was correlated with greater internalized homophobia.

Integrating religious beliefs with one's sexual orientation is a way that oftentimes the conflict between being religious and homosexual is resolved. While this study found that integration leads to more disclosure, this finding is tempered by the fact that many participants either did not respond or responded "neutral" to the integration-related question. This may mean that a resolution was also reached by a change in religious affiliation to one that is less conservative and more accepting and affirming of homosexuality, a change to identifying as "spiritual", or integrating more spirituality into one's religious beliefs. Future research should continue to explore this area.

Psychological well-being was included in this study to better understand the psychological implications of disclosure, internalized homophobia, and religiosity in the lives of lesbians. A positive relationship was found between both verbal and behavioral disclosure and psychological well-being, consistent with previous research. Overall, no strong relationship was found between religiosity and psychological well-being, although a small yet significant relationship showed that more extrinsic religiosity leads to less psychological well-being. As expected, psychological well-being is related to less

internalized homophobia.

Overall, a combination of low internalized homophobia, high intrinsic religiosity, and low extrinsic religiosity are predictive of higher levels of psychological well-being. The majority of relationships in this study were small which indicates that there are other variables that contribute to psychological well-being that are not being examined in this study. This exploratory study, despite the methodological limitations, has offered a broad base of information about the interrelationships between disclosure, internalized homophobia, religiosity, and psychological well-being that has set the stage for further research.



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- c. Dating one person exclusively.
- d. Committed relationship – not living together.
- e. Committed relationship- living together.

10) If currently in a relationship, please specify duration of relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

11) Please indicate where you fall on this continuum:

Not Religious			Somewhat Religious		Very Religious	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12) Please indicate where you fall on this continuum:

Not Spiritual			Somewhat Spiritual		Very Spiritual	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13) Religion you were raised:

- a. No religion
- b. Spiritual but not religious
- c. Muslim
- d. Mormon
- e. Jewish
- f. Hindu
- g. Catholic
- h. Buddhist
- i. Atheist
- j. Agnostic
- k. Quaker
- l. Christian (Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_)
- m. Protestant (Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_)
- n. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14) Religion you are now:

- a. No religion
- b. Spiritual but not religious
- c. Muslim
- d. Mormon
- e. Jewish
- f. Hindu
- g. Catholic
- h. Buddhist
- i. Atheist
- j. Agnostic
- k. Quaker
- l. Christian (Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_)
- m. Protestant (Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_)
- n. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15) If your religion changed, at what age did this change take place? \_\_\_\_\_

If you consider yourself at least somewhat religious, please indicate where you fall on the following continuums:

Strongly Disagree			Neutral		Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16) I adhere strongly to my religion and my sexual orientation is not important to me.						

17) My sexual orientation is important to me and as a result I have abandoned my religion. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18) My sexual orientation and my religion are equally important to me, yet I keep them fairly separate in my life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19) My sexual orientation and my religion are equally important to me, and I feel that I have integrated them together. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20) Using the following 10-point scale, how would you identify yourself?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Exclusively			Bisexual				Exclusively		
Heterosexual							Lesbian		

## APPENDIX B

### LESBIAN INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA SCALE (Szymanski & Chung, 2001) (LIHS)

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by writing in the appropriate number from the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers; however, for the data to be meaningful, you must answer each statement given below as honestly as possible. Your responses are completely anonymous. Please do not leave any statement unmarked. Some statements may depict situations that you have not experienced. Please imagine yourself in those situations when answering those statements.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Most of my friends are lesbian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) I try not to give signs that I am a lesbian. I am careful about the way I dress; the jewelry I wear; and the places, people, and events I talk about.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3) Just as in other species, female homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in human women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4) I can't stand lesbians who are too "butch." They make lesbians as a group look bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5) Attending lesbian events and organizations is important to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6) I hate myself for being attracted to other women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7) Female homosexuality is a sin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8) I am comfortable being an "out" lesbian. I want others to know and see me as a lesbian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9) I feel comfortable with the diversity of women who make up the lesbian community.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10) I have respect and admiration for other lesbians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11) I feel isolated and separate from other lesbians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12) I wouldn't mind if my boss knew that I was a lesbian.

\_\_\_\_\_ 13) If some lesbians would change and be more acceptable to the larger society, lesbians as a group would not have to deal with so much negativity and discrimination.

\_\_\_\_\_ 14) I am proud to be a lesbian.

\_\_\_\_\_ 15) I am not worried about anyone finding out that I am a lesbian.

\_\_\_\_\_ 16) When interacting with members of the lesbian community, I often feel different and alone, like I don't fit in.

\_\_\_\_\_ 17) Female homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle.

\_\_\_\_\_ 18) I feel bad for acting on my lesbian desires.

\_\_\_\_\_ 19) I feel comfortable talking to my heterosexual friends about my everyday home life with my lesbian partner/lover or my everyday activities with my lesbian friends.

\_\_\_\_\_ 20) Having lesbian friends is important to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 21) I am familiar with lesbian books and/or magazines.

\_\_\_\_\_ 22) Being a part of the lesbian community is important to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 23) As a lesbian, I am loveable and deserving of respect.

\_\_\_\_\_ 24) It is important for me to conceal the fact that I am a lesbian from my family.

\_\_\_\_\_ 25) I feel comfortable talking about homosexuality in public.

\_\_\_\_\_ 26) I live in fear that someone will find out that I am a lesbian.

\_\_\_\_\_ 27) If I could change my sexual orientation and become heterosexual, I would.

\_\_\_\_\_ 28) I do not feel the need to be on guard, lie, or hide my lesbianism to other.

\_\_\_\_\_ 29) I feel comfortable joining a lesbian social group, lesbian sports team, or lesbian organization.

\_\_\_\_\_ 30) When speaking of my lesbian partner/lover to a straight person, I change pronouns so that others will think I'm involved with a man rather than a woman.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 31) Being a lesbian makes my future look bleak and hopeless.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32) Children should be taught that being gay is a normal and healthy way for people to be.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33) My feelings toward other lesbians are often negative.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34) If my peers knew of my lesbianism, I am afraid that many would not want to be friends with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35) I feel comfortable being a lesbian
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36) Social situations with other lesbians make me feel uncomfortable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37) I wish some lesbians wouldn't "flaunt" their lesbianism. They only do it for shock value and it doesn't accomplish anything positive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38) I don't feel disappointment in myself for being a lesbian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39) I am familiar with lesbian movies and/or music.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40) I am aware of the history concerning the development of lesbian communities and/or the lesbian/gay rights movement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41) I act as if my lesbian lovers are merely friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 42) Lesbian lifestyles are a viable and legitimate choice for women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43) I feel comfortable discussing my lesbianism with my family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44) I don't like to be seen in public with lesbians who look "too butch" or are "too out" because others will then think I am a lesbian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45) I could not confront a straight friend or acquaintance if she or he made a homophobic or heterosexist statement to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 46) I am familiar with lesbian music festivals and conferences.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 47) When I speak of my lesbian lover/partner to a straight person, I often use neutral pronouns so the sex of the person is vague.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 48) Lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49) Lesbians are too aggressive.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 50) I frequently make negative comments about other lesbians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 51) Growing up in a lesbian family is detrimental for children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 52) I am familiar with community resources for lesbians (i.e., bookstores, support groups, bars, etc.).

## APPENDIX C

OUTNESS INVENTORY; Mohr & Fassinger (2000)  
(OI)

Use the following rating scale to indicate how open you are about your sexual orientation to the people listed below. Try to respond to all of the items, but select "NA" if they do not apply to you.

RATING SCALE								
1 =	person	<u>definitely</u>	does	<u>not</u>	know	about	your sexual orientation	status.
2 =	person	<u>might</u>	know	about	your sexual orientation	status, but it is	<u>never</u>	talked about.
3 =	person	<u>probably</u>	knows	about	your sexual orientation	status, but it is	<u>never</u>	talked about.
4 =	person	<u>probably</u>	knows	about	your sexual orientation	status, but it is	<u>rarely</u>	talked about.
5 =	person	<u>definitely</u>	knows	about	your sexual orientation	status, but it is	<u>rarely</u>	talked about.
6 =	person	<u>definitely</u>	knows	about	your sexual orientation	status, and it is	<u>sometimes</u>	talked about.
7 =	person	<u>definitely</u>	knows	about	your sexual orientation	status, and it is	<u>openly</u>	talked about.

mother	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
father	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
siblings (sisters, brothers)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
extended family, relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
<u>old</u> heterosexual friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
<u>new</u> heterosexual friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
strangers, new acquaintances	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
work peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
work supervisors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
members of my religious community (e.g., church, temple)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
leaders of my religious community (e.g., minister, rabbi)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

## APPENDIX D

BEHAVIORAL SELF-DISCLOSURE QUESTIONNAIRE; Carroll & Gilroy (2000)  
(BDQ)

Please read each statement below. Circle the number which most accurately describes you. Since many of the statements make reference to a partner, if you are not currently in a relationship, please respond according to your most recent relationship, or write "NA" for not applicable.

	Never True	Almost Never True	Sometimes True	Almost Always True	Always True
When my partner and I stay overnight in the homes of family members we sleep in the same bed.	1	2	3	4	5
I refer to my partner by name when other non-gay people are talking about their respective spouses or boyfriends/girlfriends.	1	2	3	4	5
When in conversations with non-gay friends about romantic relationships, I include the correct pronoun to indicate the same-sex nature of the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
I attend national events which promote lesbian/gay/bisexual rights.	1	2	3	4	5
I wear articles of clothing with gay and lesbian symbols/slogans.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I have a joint checking account with our names on both sets of checks.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I sleep in the same bed when family members come to my home for a visit.	1	2	3	4	5
I mention living with a same-sex person when talking with other non-gay people.	1	2	3	4	5

In conversations with non-gay people I use the term "partner" or "significant other".	1	2	3	4	5
I attend lesbian/gay/bisexual events in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
I display a bumper sticker on my car which contains lesbian/gay symbols or slogans.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I purchased a home together and both are names are on the deed.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I sleep in the same bed when non-gay friends come to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
When out in public my partner and I touch one another.	1	2	3	4	5
In conversations with non-gay people about political issues I defend gay rights.	1	2	3	4	5
I vacation at gay-friendly resort areas.	1	2	3	4	5
I wear jewelry which has lesbian/gay symbols or slogans.	1	2	3	4	5
When my partner and I stay overnight at the homes of non-gay friends we sleep in the same bed.	1	2	3	4	5
I take my partner to a social function at work.	1	2	3	4	5
My home contains gay-themed art work.	1	2	3	4	5
I subscribe to gay publications.	1	2	3	4	5
My home contains photographs	1	2	3	4	5

of my partner which are on display when my non-gay friends come to visit.

I display photographs of my partner at work.	1	2	3	4	5
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My home contains books on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues which are visible and aren't removed when visitors come.	1	2	3	4	5
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

My partner and I send jointly signed greeting cards and/or gifts to family members.	1	2	3	4	5
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I mention my partner's name to my supervisor at work.	1	2	3	4	5
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My home contains novels written for and by lesbian/gay authors which are visible and aren't removed when visitors come.	1	2	3	4	5
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I bring my partner to my family's house during a holiday celebration.	1	2	3	4	5
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I mention my partner's name to my co-workers at work.	1	2	3	4	5
-------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I bring my partner to social functions where my family members are present	1	2	3	4	5
----------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

My home contains photographs of my partner and I which are not removed when family members come to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
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## APPENDIX E

**SCALE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING; Ryff (1989)**  
**SPWB**

Circle the number that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with each statement.

- |                      |                      |                      |                   |                   |                   |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree<br>Somewhat | Disagree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Somewhat | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 1                    | 2                    | 3                    | 4                 | 5                 | 6                 |
- 
1. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.
  2. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
  3. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.
  4. Most people see me as loving and affectionate.
  5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.
  6. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.
  7. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.
  8. The demands of everyday life often get me down.
  9. I don't want to try new ways of doing things--my life is fine the way it is.
  10. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.
  11. I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.
  12. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.
  14. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.
  15. I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.
  16. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members or friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I like most aspects of my personality.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I don't have many people who want to listen when I need to talk.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. It seems to me that most other people have more friends than I do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.



\_\_\_\_\_ 37. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

\_\_\_\_\_ 38. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.

\_\_\_\_\_ 39. I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to get done.

\_\_\_\_\_ 40. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

\_\_\_\_\_ 41. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

\_\_\_\_\_ 42. I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ 43. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.

\_\_\_\_\_ 44. I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree.

\_\_\_\_\_ 45. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 46. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.

\_\_\_\_\_ 47. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

\_\_\_\_\_ 48. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

\_\_\_\_\_ 49. I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.

\_\_\_\_\_ 50. There is truth to the saying you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

\_\_\_\_\_ 51. I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 52. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

\_\_\_\_\_ 53. The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it.

\_\_\_\_\_ 54. When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.

## APPENDIX F

AGE-UNIVERSAL INTRINSIC-EXTRINSIC RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION SCALE,  
Maltby & Lewis (1996)

We are interested in measuring the extent of your religious attitudes and behaviors. Think about each item carefully. Does the attitude or behavior described in the statement apply to me?

No 1	Not Certain 2	Yes 3
_____		1. I enjoy reading about my religion.
_____		2. I go to my place of worship because it helps me make friends.
_____		3. It doesn't matter what I believe so long as I am good.
_____		4. Sometimes I have to ignore my religious beliefs because of what other people think of me.
_____		5. It is important for me to spend time in private thought and prayer.
_____		6. I would prefer to go to my place of worship more than once a week.
_____		7. I have often had a strong sense of God's/my higher power's presence.
_____		8. I pray mainly to gain relief and protection.
_____		9. I try to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.
_____		10. What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.
_____		11. My religion is important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.
_____		12. I would rather join a study group than a social group at my place of worship.
_____		13. Prayer is for peace and happiness.
_____		14. Although I am religious, I don't let it affect my daily life.
_____		15. I go to my place of worship mostly to spend time with my friends.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I go to my place of worship mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I pray mainly because I have been taught to pray.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Prayers I say when I am alone are as important to me as those I say in my place of worship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life.



## VITA

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**EDUCATION**


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PSY.D., CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, 2004	2000 – 2004
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**PREDOCTORAL CLINICAL INTERNSHIP**

AUGUST 2003 – AUGUST 2004

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APA Approved Internship UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE  
Amherst, MA

***Focus Areas: Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Clients & Eating Disorders******Population:*** Outpatient college students.***Presenting Concerns:*** Eating disorders, sexual orientation concerns, affective disorders, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders, personality disorders, chemical dependency and abuse disorders, trauma survivor issues, various life phase problems. Behavioral Medicine Clinic: Migraine headaches, muscle tension headaches, anxiety disorders, irritable bowel syndrome.***Responsibilities:*** Conduct initial intake evaluations; develop initial treatment plans; conduct brief and long-term individual therapy for a caseload of 12-20 clients (individuals and couples); co-facilitate an interpersonal process group for undergraduate students; serve as on-call clinician approximately once every nine days; serve as occasional triage clinician; attend weekly behavioral medicine seminars on biofeedback and hypnosis; see clients in behavioral medicine clinic, participate in weekly seminar on brief therapy; participate in biweekly seminars on crisis intervention and multiculturalism, attend weekly meetings with the eating disorders intake team for case review and assignment; attend monthly assessment seminar; conduct at least one psychological assessment; attend monthly staff development seminars; attend weekly clinical team meetings for case presentations; conduct psycho-educational programs on campus on a variety of topics; serve on diversity committee.***Supervision:*** Linda Scott, Ph.D., Barry Farber, M.D.**LANGUAGES**

- 
- **Spanish:** fluency reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension
  - **French:** moderate fluency reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

- 
- American Psychological Association, Student Affiliate
    - Division 44 affiliate
    - Division 35 affiliate